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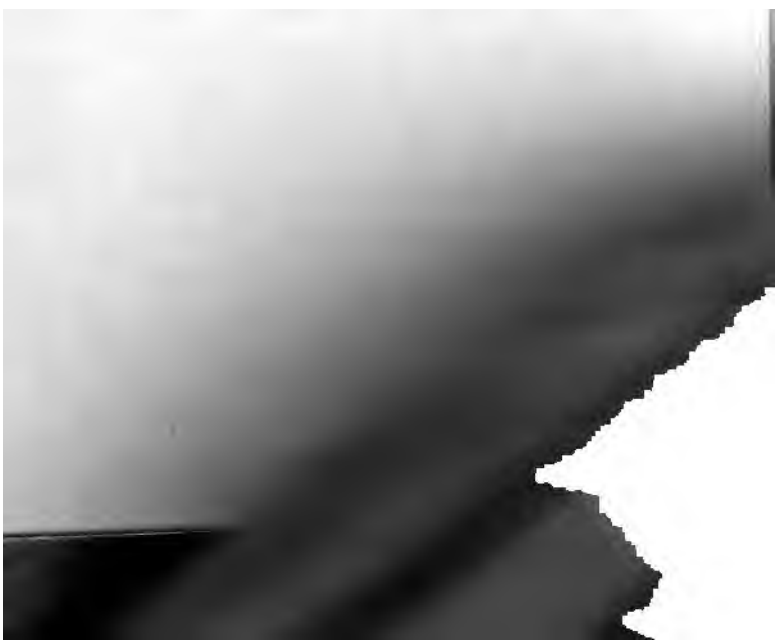

LONDON: PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, STAMFORD STREET
AND CHARING CROSS.

M. OR N.

"SIMILIA SIMILIBUS CURANTUR."

By G. J. WHYTE-MELVILLE,

AUTHOR OF "DIGBY GRAND," "CERISE," "THE GLADIATORS," ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOLUME I.

LONDON:

CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.

1869.

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250. y. 197.

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M. OR N.

"Similia similibus curantur."

CHAPTER I.

"SMALL AND EARLY."

A WILD wet night in the Channel, the white waves leaping, lashing, and tumbling together in that confusion of troubled waters, which nautical men call a "cross-sea." A dreary, dismal night on Calais sands: faint moonshine struggling through a low driving scud, the harbour-lights quenched and blurred in mist. Such a night as bids the trim French sentry hug himself in his watch-coat, calmly cursing the weather, while he hums the chorus of a comic opera, driving his thoughts by force of contrast to the lustrous glow of the wine-shop,

the sparkling eyes and gold ear-rings of Mademoiselle Thérèse, who presides over Love and Bacchus therein. Such a night as gives the travellers in the mail-packet some notion of those ups and downs in life which landsmen may bless themselves to ignore, as hints to the Queen's Messenger, seasoned though he be, that ten minutes more of that heaving, pitching, tremulous motion would lay him alongside those poor sick neophytes whom he pities and condemns; reminding him how even *he* has cause to be thankful when he reflects that, save for an occasional Levanter, the Mediterranean is a mill-pond compared to La Manche. Such a night as makes the hardy fisherman running for Havre or St. Valérie growl his "Babord" and "Tribord" in harsher tones than usual to his mate, because he cannot keep his thoughts off Marie and the little ones ashore; his dark-eyed Marie, praying her heart out to the Virgin on her knees, feeling, as the fierce wind howls and blusters round their hut, that not on her wedding-morning, not on that summer

eve when he won her down by the sea, did she love her Pierre so dearly, as now in this dark boisterous weather, that causes her very flesh to creep while she listens to its roar. Nobody who could help it would be abroad on Calais sands. "Pas même un Anglais!" mutters the sentry, ordering his firelock with a ring, and wishing it was time for the Relief. But an Englishman *is* out nevertheless, wandering aimlessly to and fro on the beach; turning his face to windward against the driving rain; trying to think the wet on his cheek is all from *without;* vainly hoping to stifle grief, remorse, anxiety, by exposure and active bodily exercise.

"How could I stay in that cursed room?" he mutters, striding wildly among the sandhills. "The very tick of the clock was enough to drive one mad in those long fearful pauses —solemn and silent as death! Can't the fools do anything for her? What is the use of nurses and doctors, and all the humbug of medicine and science? My darling! my

darling! It was too cruel to hear you wailing and crying, and to know I could do you no good! What a coward I am to have fled into the wilderness like a murderer! I couldn't have stayed there, I feel I couldn't! I wish I hadn't listened at the door! Only yesterday you seemed so well and in such good spirits, with your dark eyes looking so patiently and fondly into mine! And now, if she should die!—if she should die!"

Then he stands stock-still, turning instinctively from the wind like one of the brutes, while the past comes back in a waking dream so akin to reality, that even in his pre-occupation he seems to live the last year of his life over again. Once more he is at the old place in Cheshire, whither he has gone like any other young dandy, an agreeable addition to a country shooting-party because of his chestnut locks, his blue eyes, his handsome person, and general recklessness of character: agreeable, he reflects, to elderly *roués* and established married women, but a scarecrow to mothers, and a

stumbling-block to daughters, as being utterly penniless and rather good-for-nothing. Once more he comes down late for dinner, to find a vacant place by that beautiful girl, with her delicate features, her wealth of raven hair, above all, with the soft, sad, dreamy eyes, that look so loving, so trustful, and so good. In such characters as theirs these things are soon accomplished. A walk or two, a waltz, a skein of silk to wind, a drive in a pony-carriage, an afternoon church, and behold them in the memorable summer-house, where he won her heart — completely and unreservedly, while flinging down his own! Then came all the sweet excitement, all the fascinating mystery of mutual understanding, of stolen glances, of hidden meanings in the common phrases and daily courtesies of social life. It was so delightful for each to feel that other existence bound up in its own, to look down from their enchanted mountain, with pity not devoid of contempt on the commonplace dwellers on the plain, undeterred by proofs more numerous

perhaps on the hills of Paphos than in any other airy region, that

"Great clymbers fall unsoft;"

to know that come sorrow, suffering, disgrace, or misfortune, there was refuge and safety for the poor, broken-winged bird, though its plumage were torn by the fowler's cruelty, or even soiled in the storm of shame. Alas! that the latter should arrive too soon!

Perhaps of this young couple, the girl, in her perfect faith and entire self-sacrifice, may have been less aghast than her lover at the imminence of discovery, reprobation, and scorn. When no other course was left open, she eloped willingly enough with the man she had trusted —shutting her eyes to consequences, in that recklessness of devotion which, lead though it may to much unhappiness in life, constitutes not the least lovable trait of the female character, so ready to burst into extremes of right and wrong.

Besides, who cares for consequences at nine-

teen, with the sun glinting on the waves of the Channel, the sea-air freshening cheek and brow, the coast of Picardy rising bright and glistening, in smiles of welcome, and the dear, fond face looking down so proudly and wistfully on its treasure? Consequences indeed! They have been left with the heavy baggage at London Bridge, to reach their proper owner possibly hereafter in Paris; but meantime, with this fresh breeze blowing—on the blue sea—under the blue sky—they do not exist—there are no such things!

These young people were very foolish, very wicked, but they loved each other very dearly. Mr. Bruce was none of those heartless, unscrupulous Lovelaces, oftener met with in fiction than in real life, who can forget they are *men* as well as gentlemen; and when he crossed the Channel with Miss Algernon, it was from sheer want of forethought, from mismanagement, no doubt, but still more from misfortune, that she was Miss Algernon still.

To marry, was to be disinherited—that he

knew well enough; but neither he nor his Nina, as he called her, would have paused for this consideration. There were other difficulties, trivial in appearance, harassing, vexatious, insurmountable in reality, that yet seemed from day to day about to vanish; so they waited, and temporized, and hesitated, till the opportunity came of escaping together, and they availed themselves of it without delay.

Now they had reached French ground, and were free, but it was too late! That was why Mr. Bruce roamed so wildly to-night over the Calais sands, tortured by a cruel fear that he might lose the treasure of his heart for ever; exaggerating, in that supreme moment of anxiety, her sufferings, her danger, perhaps even her priceless value to himself.

To do him justice, he did not think for an instant of the many galling annoyances to which both must be subjected hereafter in the event of her coming safely through her trial. He found no time to reflect on a censorious world, an outraged circle of friends, an in-

furiated family; on the cold shoulder Mrs. Grundy would turn upon his darling, and the fair mark he would himself be bound to offer that grim old father, who had served under Wellington, or that soft-spoken dandy brother in the Guards, unerring at "rocketers," and deadly for all ground game, neither of whom would probably shoot the wider, under the circumstances that he, the offender, felt in honour he must stand at least one discharge without retaliation, an arrangement which makes twelve paces uncomfortably close quarters for the passive and immovable target. He scarcely dwelt a moment on the bitter scorn with which his own great-uncle, whose natural heir he was, would calmly and deliberately curse this piece of childish folly, while he disinherited its perpetrator without scruple or remorse. He never even considered the disadvantage under which a life that ought to be very dear to him was now opening on the world: a life that might be blighted through its whole course by his own folly, punished, a score of years hence, for

unwittingly arriving a few weeks too soon. No! He could think of nothing but Nina's anguish and Nina's danger; could only wander helplessly backwards and forwards, stupefied by the continuous gusts of that boisterous sea-wind, stunned by the dull wash of the incoming tide, feeling for minutes at a time, a numbed, apathetic impotency; till, roused and stung by a rush of recurring apprehensions, he hastened back to his hotel, white, agitated, dripping wet, moving with wavering gestures and swift, irregular strides, like a man in a trance.

At the foot of the staircase he ran into the arms of a dapper French doctor, young, yet experienced, a man of science, a man of pleasure, an anatomist, a dancer, a philosopher, and a dandy—who put both hands on his shoulders, and looked in his face with so comical an expression of congratulation, sympathy, pity, and amusement, that Mr. Bruce's fears vanished on the instant, and he found voice to ask, in husky accents, "if it was over?"

"Over!" repeated the doctor. "Pardon,

my good sir. For our interesting young friend it is only just begun. A young lady, monsieur, a veritable little aristocrat, with a delicate nose, and, my faith, sound and powerful lungs! I make you my compliment, monsieur. I am happy to be the first to advertise you of good news. It is late. Let madame be kept tranquil. You will permit me to wish you good-night. I will return again in the morning."

"And she is safe?" exclaimed Bruce, crushing the doctor's hand in a grasp like a vice.

"Safe!" answered the little man. "Parbleu —yes—for the present, safe as the mole in the harbour, and likely to remain so if you will only keep out of the room. Come, you shall see her for one quite little moment. She desires it so much. And when I scratch at the door thus, you will come out. Agreed? Enter then. You shall embrace your child."

So the good-natured man turned into the hotel again, to conduct Mr. Bruce back to the door from which he had fled in anguish an hour or two ago, and was thus five minutes

too late for another professional engagement, which could not be postponed, but went on indeed very well without him, the expectant lady being a person of experience, the wife of a Calais fisherman, and now employed for the thirteenth time in her yearly occupation. But this has nothing to do with Mr. Bruce.

That gentleman stole on tiptoe through the darkened room, catching a glimpse as he passed the tawdry mirror on the chimneypiece, of a very pale and anxious face strangely unlike his own, while from behind the half-drawn bed-curtains he heard a quiet placid breathing, and a weak, faint voice with its tender whisper, "Charlie, are you there? My darling, I begged so hard to see you for one minute, and—Charlie dear, to—to show you *this*."

This was a morsel of something swathed up in wrappings, round which the young mother's arm was folded with proud, protecting love; but I think he had been too anxious about the woman to feel a proper elation in his new position as father to the child. The tears came

thick to his eyes once more, while he caught the pale, fragile hand that lay so weary and listless on the counterpane, to press it against his lips, his cheeks, his forehead, murmuring broken words of endearment, and gratitude, and joy.

She would have kept him there all night: she would have talked to him for an hour, feeble as she was, of that little being, in so short a time promoted to its sovereignty of Baby (with a capital B), in which she had already discovered instincts, qualities, high reasoning powers, noble moral characteristics: but the doctor's tap was heard, "scratching," as he called it, at the door, and Bruce, too happy not to be docile, had the good sense to obey his summons without delay.

"Let them sleep, monsieur," said the Frenchman, struggling into his great-coat, and hurrying downstairs. "It will do them more good than all your prevision, and all my experience. I will return in the morning, to inquire after madame and to renew my acquaintance with

mademoiselle—I should say with 'your charming mees.' Monsieur, you are now father of a family—you should keep early hours. Good-night then—till to-morrow."

Bruce looked after him with a blessing on his lips, and a fervent thanksgiving in his heart to the Providence that had spared him his treasure. For the moment, I believe, he completely forgot that important personage with whom originated all their anxiety and discomfort. To men, indeed, there is so little individuality about a Baby, that, I fear, it has to be weaned and vaccinated, and to go through many other processes before it ceases to be a thing, and rather an inconvenient one. No; Bruce went to his own sitting-room, with his heart so full of his Nina, there was scarcely place for other considerations; therefore, instead of going to bed, he kicked off his wet boots, turned on a brilliant illumination of gas, and threw himself into an arm-chair — to smoke. After the excitement he had lately passed through, the first few whiffs of his cigar

were soothing and consolatory in the extreme, but reflection comes with tobacco, not less surely than warmth comes with fire; and soon he began to see the crowd of fresh difficulties which the events of to-night would bring swarming round his devoted head. How he cursed his foolish calculations, his ill-judged caution, his cowardly scruples, thus to have postponed the ceremony of marriage till too late. How impossible it would be now, to throw dust in the eyes of society as to dates and circumstances! how fruitless the reparation which should certainly be put off no longer, no, not a day! It seemed so hard that he, of all the world, should have injured the woman who loved him, the woman whom he so devotedly loved in return. He almost hated the innocent baby for its inopportune arrival; but remembering how that poor little creature too must bear the punishment of his crime, he flung the end of his cigar against the stove with a curse, and for one moment—only one bitter, painful moment—found himself wishing

he had never met, never loved, his darling; had left the lamb at peace in its fold, the rose ungathered on its stalk.

The clock did not tick twice before there came a reaction. It seemed so impossible that they should be independent of each other. He would not be himself without Nina! and the flow of his affection, like the back-water of a mill-stream, returned only the stronger for its momentary interruption. After all, Nina was everything, Nina was the first consideration. Something must be done at once. As soon as she could bear it, that ceremony must be gone through which should have been performed long ago. He was young, he was impatient, he would fain be at work without delay; so he turned to his writing-table, and began opening certain letters that had already followed him into France, but that he had laid aside without examination, in the excitement of the last few hours.

They were not calculated to afford him much distraction. A circular from a coal company, a couple of invitations to dinner, a

tailor's bill, and a manifesto from the firm, calling attention to the powers of endurance with which their little account had "made running" for a considerable period, while promising a "lawyer's letter" to enforce payment of the same. Next this hostile protocol lay a business-like missive bearing a Lincoln's Inn look about it not to be mistaken, and which Bruce determined he would leave unopened till the morning, when, if Nina had slept, and was doing well, he felt nothing in the world could make him unhappy.

"Serves me right, though," he yawned, "for deserting Poole. *He* wouldn't have bothered me for a miserable pony at such a time as this;" and flinging off his clothes, in less than five minutes he was as fast asleep as if he had never known an anxiety in the world, but was lulled by the soothing considerations of a well-spent past, an untroubled conscience, and a balance at his banker's!

So he slept, and dreamed not as those sleep who are thoroughly out-wearied in body and

mind, waking only when the sun had been up more than an hour, and the stormy night had given place to a clear, unclouded day.

The Channel was all blue and white now; the rollers, as they subsided into a long heaving ground-swell, bringing in with them a freight of health and freshness to the shore. The gulls were soaring and screaming round the harbour, edging their wings with gold as they dipped and wheeled in the morning light. Everything spoke of hope and happiness and vitality. Bruce opened his window, drew in long breaths of the keen, reviving air, and stole to listen at Nina's door.

How his heart went up in gratitude to heaven! Mother and child were sleeping—so peacefully, so soundly. Mother and child! At that early period the dearest, the sweetest, the holiest link of human love—the gold without the dross, the flower without the insect, the wine without the headache, the full fruition of the feelings without the wear and tear of the heart.

He could have kissed the antiquated French chambermaid, dressed like a Sister of Mercy, who met him in the passage, and wishing "Monsieur" good-morning, congratulated him with tears of honest sympathy in her glittering, bold black eyes. He *did* give a five-franc piece to the alert and well-dressed waiter, who looked as if he had never been in bed, and never required to go. It may be this impulse of generosity reminded him that five-franc pieces were likely to be scarce with him in future, and an unpleasant association of ideas brought the lawyer's letter to his mind. There it lay, square and uncompromising, between his watch and his cigar-case. He opened it, I am afraid, with a truly British oath.

He turned quite white when he read it the first time, but the blood rushed to his temples on a second perusal, and he flung himself down on his knees at the window-sill, thanking Providence, somewhat inconsiderately, for the benefits that only came to him through another man's death.

This letter, indeed, though the composition of a lawyer, had not been written at the instance of his long-suffering tailor, but was from the solicitor who conducted the business of his family. It advised him, in very concise language, of his great-uncle's sudden "demise," as it was worded, "intestate;" informing him that he thus became heir, as next of kin, to the whole personal and real property of the deceased, and concluded with sincere congratulations on his accession to a fine fortune, not without a hope that their firm might continue to manage his affairs, and afford him the same satisfaction that had always been expressed by his late lamented relative, &c.

The surprise staggered him like a blow. From such blows, however, we soon "come to time," willing to take any amount of similar punishment. He gave himself credit for self-denial in not waking Nina on the instant to tell her of their good fortune. Still more, he plumed himself on his forethought in resolving to ask her doctor's leave before he entered on

so exciting a topic with the invalid. He longed to tell somebody. He was so happy, so elated, so thankful! and yet, amidst all his joy, there rankled an uncomfortable sensation of remorse and self-reproach when he thought of the little blighted life, the little injured helpless creature nestling to its young mother's side in the next room.

CHAPTER II.

"NIGHTFALL."

IT is more than twenty years ago, and yet how vividly it all comes back to him to-night!

The sun has gone down in streaks of orange and crimson over the old oaks that crown the deer-park sloping upward to the rear of Eccles-field Manor. Mr. Bruce walks across a darkened room to throw the window open for a gasp of fresh evening air, laden with the perfume of pinks, carnations, and moss-roses in the garden below. *Her* garden! Is it possible? Something in the action reminds him of that bright, hopeful morning at Calais. Something

in the scent of the flowers steals to his brain half torpid and benumbed; his heart contracts with an agony of physical suffering. "My darling! my darling!" he murmurs, "shall I never see you tying those flowers again?" and turning from the window, he falls on his knees by the bedside with a passionate burst of weeping that, like blood-letting to the body, restores the unwelcome faculty of consciousness to his mind. When he raises his head again he knows well enough that the one great misfortune has arrived at last—that henceforth for *him* there may come, in the lapse of long years, resignation, even repose, but hope and happiness no more.

Even now, though he wonders at his own callousness, he can bear to look on the bed through a mist of tears; and, so looking, feels his intellect failing in its effort to grasp the calamity that has befallen him.

There she lies, like a dead lily, his own, his treasure, his beloved; the sweet face, calm and placid, with its chiselled ivory features, its

smooth and gentle brow, has already borrowed a higher, a more perfect beauty from the immortality on which it has entered. Not fairer, not lovelier did she look that well-remembered evening when he first knew her pure and priceless heart was his own, though she has borne him a daughter—nay, two daughters (and he winces with a fresh and different pain)—the younger as old as she was then. Her raven hair is parted soft and silky off those pale, delicate temples; her long black lashes rest upon the waxen cheek. No; she never looked as beautiful, not in the calm sleep he used to watch so lovingly; and now the deep, fond eyes must open on his own no more. She was so gentle, too, so patient, so sweet-tempered, and oh! so true. He had been a man of the world, neither better nor worse than others: he knew women well; knew how rare are the good ones; knew the prize he had won, and valued it—yes, he was sure he always valued it as it deserved. What was the use? Had she not far better have

been like the others—petulant, wilful, capricious, covetous of admiration, careless of affection, weak-headed, shallow-hearted, and desirous only of that which could not possibly be her own? Such were most of the women amongst whom he had been thrown in his youth; but oh! how unlike her who was lying dead there before his eyes.

> "For men at most differ as heaven and earth,
> But women, worst and best, as heaven and hell."

He felt so keenly now that she had been his better angel for more than twenty years; that but for her he might long ago have deteriorated to selfishness and cynicism, or sunk into that careless philosophy which believes only in the tangible, the material, and the present.

A good woman's lot may be linked to that of a bad man; she may even love him very dearly, and yet retain much of her purer, better nature amidst all the mire in which she is steeped; but it is not so with us. To care for a bad woman is to be dragged down to her

level, inch by inch, till the intellect itself becomes sapped in a daily degradation of the heart. From such slavery emancipation is cheap under any suffering, at any sacrifice. The lopping of a limb is a painful process, but above a gangrened wound experienced surgeons amputate without scruple or remorse.

On the other hand, a true woman's affection is of all earthly influences the noblest and most elevating. It encourages the highest and gentlest qualities of man's nature—his enterprise, courage, patience, sympathy, above all, his trust. Happy the pilgrim on whose life such a beacon-star has shone out to guide him in the right way; thrice happy if it sets not until it has lured him so far that he will never again turn aside from the path.

Such reflections as these, while they added to his sense of loss and loneliness, yet took so much of the sting out of Mr. Bruce's great sorrow, that he could realize it for minutes at a time without being goaded to madness or stunned to apathy by the pain.

There had been no warning—no preparation. He had left her that morning as usual, after smoking a cigar in her society on the lawn, while she tied, and snipped, and gathered the flowers of her pretty garden. He had visited the stable, ordered the pony-carriage, seen the keeper, and been to look at an Alderney cow. It was one of his idle days, yet, after twenty years of marriage, such days he still liked to spend, if possible, in the company of his wife. So he strolled back to write his letters in her boudoir, and entered it at the garden door, expecting to find her, as usual, busied in some graceful feminine employment.

Her work was heaped on the sofa; a book she had been reading lay open on the table; the very flowers she gathered an hour ago had the dew on them still. He could not finish his first letter without consulting her, for she kept his memory, his conscience, and his money, just as she kept his heart, so he ran upstairs to her bedroom door and knocked.

There was no answer, and he went in. At

the first glance he thought she must have fainted, for she had fallen on her knees against a high-backed chair, her face buried in its cushions, and one hand touching the carpet. He had a quick eye, and the turn of that grey rigid hand warned him with a stab of something he refused persistently to believe. Then he lifted her on the bed where she lay now, and sent for every doctor within reach.

He had no recollection of the interval that elapsed before the nearest could arrive, nor distinct notion of any part of that long sunny afternoon while he sat by his Nina in the death-chamber. Once he got up to stop the ticking of a clock on the chimneypiece, moving mechanically with stealthy footfall across the room lest she should be disturbed. The doctors came and went, agreeing, as they left the house, that he had answered their questions with wonderful precision and presence of mind; nay, that he was less prostrated by the blow than they should have expected. "Disease of the heart," said they—I believe they called it

"the *pericardium*;" and after paying a tribute of admiration to the loveliness of the dead lady, discussed the leading article of that day's "Times" with perfect equanimity. What would you have? There can be but one person in the world to whom another is more than all the world beside.

This person was sitting by Nina's bed, except for a few brief minutes at a time, utterly stupefied and immovable. Even Maud—his cherished daughter Maud—whose smile had hitherto been welcome in his eyes as the light of morning, could not rouse his attention by the depth of her own uncontrolled grief. He sat like an idiot or an opium eater, till something prompted him to open the window and gasp for a breath of fresh evening air. Then it all came back to him, and he awoke to the full consciousness of his misery.

There are men, though not many, and these, perhaps, the least inclined to prate about it, who have one attachment in their lives to which every other sentiment is but an accessory

and a satellite. Such natures are often very bold to dare, very strong to endure, very difficult to assail, save in their single vulnerable point. Force that, and the man's whole vitality seems to collapse. He does not even make a fight of it, but fails, gives in, and goes down without an effort. Such was the character of Mr. Bruce, and to-day he had gotten his death-blow.

The stars twinkled out faintly one by one, the harvest-moon rose broad and ruddy behind the wooded hill, and still he sat stupefied at the bedside. The door opened gently to admit a beautiful girl, strangely, startlingly like her dead mother, who came in with a cup of tea and a candle. Setting these on the chimney-piece, she moved softly round to where he sat, and pressed his head, with both hands, against her breast.

"Dearest father," said she, "I have brought you some tea. Try and rouse yourself, papa, dear papa, for *my* sake. You love *me* too."

The appeal was well chosen; once more the

tears came to his eyes, and he woke up as from a dream.

"You are a good girl, Maud," he answered, with a vague, distracted air. "I have my children left—I have my children left! But all the world cannot make up to me for what I have lost!"

She thought his mind was wandering, and tried to recall him to himself.

"We must bear our sorrows as best we may, papa," she answered, very gently. "We must help each other. You and I are alone now in the world."

A contraction, as of some fresh pain, came over his livid face. He raised his head to speak, but, stopping himself with an obvious effort, looked long and scrutinisingly in his daughter's face.

Maud Bruce was a very beautiful girl even now, in the extremity of her sorrow. She had been crying heartily; no wonder, but her delicate features were not swollen, nor her dark eyes dimmed. The silky hair shone smooth

and trim, the muslin dress was not rumpled nor disarranged, and the white hands, with which she still caressed her father's sorrow-laden head, neither shook nor wavered in their office.

With her mother's beauty, Miss Bruce had inherited but little of her mother's character; on the contrary, her nature, like that of her father's ancestors rather than his own, was bold, firm, and self-reliant to an unusual degree. She was hard, and that is the only epithet properly to describe her—manner, voice, appearance, all were lady-like, feminine, and exceedingly attractive; but the self-possession she never seemed to lose, would have warned an experienced admirer, that beneath the white bosom beat a heart not to be reduced by stratagem, nor carried by assault; that he must not hope to see the beautiful dark eyes veil themselves in the dreamy softness which so confesses all it means to hide; that the raven tresses clinging coquetishly to that faultless head were most unlikely to be severed as a tribute of affection for any one whose conquest

would not be a question of pride and profit to their owner. Tenderness was the one quality Maud lacked, the one quality, which, like the zone of Venus, completed all her mother's attractions, with an indefinable and irresistible charm.

There is a wild German legend which describes how a certain woodman, a widower, gave shelter to a strangely fascinating dame, and falling in love with her, incontinently made his guest lawful mistress of hearth and home; how, notwithstanding his infatuated passion, and intense admiration for her beauty, there was yet in it a fierceness which chilled and repelled him, while he worshipped; how his children could never be brought to look in the fair face of their stepmother without crying aloud for fear; and how at last he discovered, to his horror and dismay, that he had wedded a fearful creature, half wolf, half woman, combining the seductions of the syren with the cruel voracity of the brute. There was something about Maud Bruce to remind one of that

horrible myth, even now, now at her gentlest and softest, while she clung round a sorrowing father, by the death-bed of one, whom, in their different ways, both had very dearly loved.

It was well that the young lady preserved her presence of mind, for Bruce seemed incapable of connected thought or action. He roused himself, indeed, at his daughter's call, but gazed stupidly about him, stammered in his speech, and faltered in his step when he crossed the room. The shock of grief had evidently overmastered his faculties—something, too, besides affliction, seemed to worry and distress him—something of which he wished to unbosom himself, but that yet he could not make up his mind to reveal. Maud, whose quickness of perception was seldom at fault, did not fail to observe this, and reviewing the position with her accustomed coolness, drew her father gently to the writing-table, and sat down.

"Papa," said she, "there is much to be done.

We must exert ourselves. It will do us both good. Bargrave can be down by the middle of the day, to-morrow. Let me write for him at once."

Bargrave and Co. were Mr. Bruce's solicitors, as they had been his great-uncle's: it was the same firm, indeed, that had apprised him of his inheritance at Calais twenty years ago. How he rejoiced in their intelligence then! What was the use of an inheritance now?

A weary lassitude had come over him; he seemed incapable of exertion, and shook his head in answer to Maud's appeal; but again some hidden motive stung him into action, and taking his seat at the writing-table, he seized a pen, only to let it slip helplessly through his fingers, while he looked in his daughter's face with a vacant stare.

Maud was equal to the occasion. Obviously something more than sorrow had reduced her father to this state. She sat down opposite, scribbled off a note hastily enough, but in the clear unwavering hand, affirmed by her corre-

spondents to be so characteristic of the writer's disposition, and ringing the bell, desired it should be despatched on the instant. "Let Thomas take the brougham with the ponies; the doctor is sure to be at home. He can bring him back at once."

Then she looked at her father, and stopped the ladies'-maid who, tearful and hysterical, had answered the familiar summons, which but this morning was "missis's bell."

"While they are putting to," said she, calmly, "I will write a telegraphic message and a letter. Tell him to send word when he is ready. I shall give him exactly ten minutes."

Once more she glanced uneasily at Mr. Bruce; what she saw decided her. In half a dozen words she penned a concise message to her father's solicitor, desiring him to come himself or send a confidential person to Eccles-field Manor, by the very first train, on urgent business; and wrote a letter as well to the same address, explaining her need of immediate assistance, for Mr. Bargrave to receive the

following morning, in case that gentleman should not obey her telegram in person, a contingency Miss Bruce considered highly probable.

The ten minutes conceded to Thomas had stretched to twenty before he was ready; for so strong is the force of habit among stablemen, that even in a case of life and death, horses cannot be allowed to start till their manes are straightened and their hoofs blacked. In the interval, Miss Bruce became more and more concerned to observe no signs of attention on her father's part—no inquiries as to her motives—apparently no consciousness of what she was doing. When the brougham was heard to roll away at a gallop, she came round and put her arm about his neck, where he sat in his chair at the writing-table.

"Papa, dear," she said, "I have told them to get your dressing-room ready. You are ill, very ill. I can see it. You must go to bed."

He nodded, and smiled. Such a weary,

silly smile, letting her lead him away like a little child. He would even have passed the bed where his wife lay without a look, but that his daughter stopped him at the door.

"Papa," said she—and the girl deserved credit for the courage with which she kept her tears back—"won't you kiss her before you go?"

It may be some instinct warned her that not in the body was he to look on the face he loved again—that those material lips were never more to touch the gentle brow which in a whole life-time he had not seen to frown—that their next greeting, freed from earthly anxieties, released from earthly troubles, must be exchanged, at no distant period, in heaven.

He obeyed unhesitatingly, imprinting a caress on his dead wife's forehead, with no kind of emotion, and so left the room, muttering vaguely certain indistinct and incoherent syllables, in which the words "Nina" and "Bargrave" were alone intelligible.

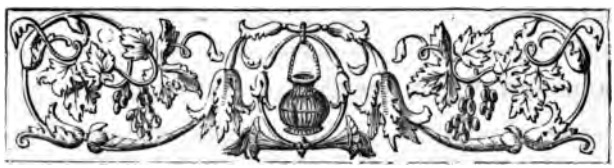
Maud saw her father to his room, and con-

signed him to the hands of his valet, to be put to bed without delay. Then she went to the dining-room, and forced herself to eat a crust of bread, to drink a single glass of sherry. "I shall need all my strength to-night," thought the girl, "to take care of poor papa, and arrange about the funeral and such matters as he cannot attend to—the funeral! Oh, mother, dear, kind mother! I wasn't half good enough to you while you were with us, and now—but I won't cry—I won't cry. There'll be time enough for all that by-and-by. The first thing to think of is about papa. He hasn't borne it well. Men have very little courage when they come to trial, and I fear—I fear, there is something sadly wrong with him. Let me see. Three-quarters of an hour to get to Bragford—five minutes' stoppage at the turnpike, for that stupid man is sure to have gone to bed—five minutes more for Doctor Skilton to put on his great-coat, forty minutes for coming back, those ponies always go faster towards home. No, he can't be here

under another hour. Another hour! It's a long time in a case like this. Suppose papa should have a paralytic stroke! And I haven't a notion what to do—the proper remedies, the best treatment. Women ought to know everything, and be ready for everything.

"Then there's the lawyer to-morrow. I don't suppose papa will be able to see him. I must think of all the business—all the arrangements. He can't be here till ten o'clock at the earliest, even if he starts by the first train. I shall write my directions for *him* in the morning. Meantime, I'll go and sit with poor papa, and see if I can't hush him off to sleep."

But when Miss Bruce reached her father's room, she found him lying in an alarming state of which she had no experience. Something between sleeping and waking, yet without the repose of the one, the consciousness of the other. So she took her place by his pillow, and watched, listening anxiously for the brougham that was to bring the doctor.



CHAPTER III.

TOM RYFE.

AT half-past eight in the morning Mr. Bargrave's office in Gray's Inn was still empty. It had been swept, indeed, and "straightened," as he called it, by a young gentleman, whose duty it was to be in attendance at all hours from sunrise to sunset, when nobody else was in the way, and who fulfilled that duty by slipping out on such available occasions to join the youth of the quarter in sports of clamour, strength, and skill. Just now he was half a mile off in Holborn, running at full speed, shouting at the top of his voice, with no

apparent object but that of exercising his own physical powers and the patience of the general public in his exertions. It was not, therefore, the step of this trusty guardian which fell sharp and quick on the stone stair outside the office, nor was it his hand, nor pass-key, that opened the door to admit Mr. Bargrave's nephew, assistant, and possible successor in the business, Tom Ryfe.

That gentleman entered with the air of a master, looked about him, detected the absence of his young subordinate as one who is disgusted rather than surprised, and lifted two envelopes lying unopened on the table with an oath. "As usual," he muttered, "telegram and letter, same date—same place. Arrive together, of course! Chances are, if there is any hurry you get the letter before the telegram. Halloa! here's a business. Bargrave's sure to be an hour late, and that young scamp not within a mile. If I had my way. Hang it! I *will* have my way. At all events I must manage *this* business my way, for it seems there's not a

moment to spare, and nobody to help me. Dorothe-a!"

The dirtiest woman to be found, probably, at that hour in the whole of London, appeared from a lower story in answer to his summons. Pushing her hair off a grimy forehead with a grimier hand, she listened to his directions, staring vacantly, as is the manner of her kind, but understanding them, nevertheless, and not incapable of remembering their purport: they were short and intelligible enough.

"Tell that young scamp he is to sleep in the office to-night. He mustn't leave it on any consideration while I'm away. I'm going into the country, and I'll break his head when I come back."

Tom Ryfe then huddled the letter into his pocket for perusal at leisure, hailed a hansom, and in less than a quarter of an hour was in his uncle's breakfast-room, bolting ham, muffins, and green tea, while his clothes were packed.

Mr. Bargrave, a bachelor, who liked his

comforts, and took care to have them, was reading the newspaper in a silk dressing-gown, and a pair of gold spectacles. He had finished breakfast—such a copious and leisurely repast as is consumed by one who dines at six, drinks a bottle of port every day at dessert, and never smoked a cigar in his life. No earthly consideration would hurry him for the next half-hour. He looked over the top of his newspaper with the placid benignity of a man who, considering digestion one of the most important functions of nature, values and encourages it accordingly.

"Sudden," observed Mr. Bargrave, in answer to his nephew's communication. "Something of a seizure, no doubt. Time is of importance; the young lady's telegram should have come to hand last night. Be so good as to make a note on the back. Three doctors, does she say? Bless me! They'll never let him get over it. Most unfortunate just now, on account of the child—of the young lady. You can take the necessary instructions. I will follow,

if required. It's twenty-three minutes' drive to the station. Better be off at once, Tom."

So Tom took the hint, and was off. While he drives to the station we may as well give an account of Tom's position in the firm of Bargrave and Co.

Old Bargrave's sister had chosen to marry a certain Mr. Ryfe, of whom nobody knew more than that he could shoot pigeons, had been concerned in one or two doubtful turf transactions, and played a good hand at whist. *While* he lived, though it was a mystery *how* he lived, he kept Mrs. Ryfe "very comfortable," to use Bargrave's expression. When he died he left her nothing but the boy Tom, a precocious urchin, inheriting some of his father's sporting propensities, with a certain slang smartness of tone and manner, acquired in those circles where horseflesh is affected as an inducement to speculation.

Mrs. Ryfe did not long survive her husband. She had married a scamp, and was, therefore, very fond of him; so before he had been dead

a year, she was laid in the same grave. Then her brother took the boy Tom, and put him into his own business, making him begin by sweeping out the office, and so requiring him to rise grade by grade till he became confidential clerk and head manager of all matters connected with the firm.

At twenty-six years of age, Tom Ryfe possessed as much experience as his principal, joined to a cunning and sharpness of intellect peculiarly his own. To take care of number one was doubtless the head clerk's ruling maxim; but while thus attending to his personal welfare, he never failed to affect a keen interest in the affairs of numbers two, three, four, and the rest. Tom Ryfe was a "friendly fellow," people declared; "a deuced friendly fellow, and knew what he was about, mind you, better than most people."

"Every great man," said the Emperor Nicholas, "has a hook in his nose." In the firmest characters, no doubt, there is a weakness by which they are to be led or driven; and

Tom Ryfe, like other notabilities, was not without this crevice in his armour, this breach in his embattled wall. He had shrewdness, knowledge of the world, common sense, and yet the one great object of his efforts was to be admitted into a class of society far above his own, and to find there an ideal lady with whom to pass the rest of his days.

"I'll marry a top-sawyer," he used to say, whenever his uncle broached the question of his settlement in life. "Why, bless ye, it's the same tackle and the same fly that takes the big fish and the little one. It's no more trouble to make up to a duchess than a dairymaid. I'll pick a real white-handed one, you see if I don't. A wife that can *move*, uncle, cool, and calm, and lofty, like an air balloon; wearing her dresses as if she was made for them, and her jewels as if she didn't know she'd got them on; looking as much at home in the Queen's drawing-room as she does in her own. That's my sort, and that's the sort I'll choose! Why, there's scores of 'em to be seen any afternoon in the

Park. Never tell me I can't go in and take my pick. 'Nothing venture, nothing have,' they say. I ain't going to venture much. I don't see occasion for it, but I'll *have* what I want, you see if I won't, or I'll know the reason why."

Whereon Bargrave, who considered womankind in general as an unnecessary evil, would reply—

"Time enough, Tom, time enough. I haven't had much experience with the ladies myself, except as clients, you know. The less I see of 'em, I think, the more I like 'em. Better put it off a little, Tom. It can be done any day, my boy, when you've an hour to spare. I wouldn't be in a hurry if I was you. There's a fresh sample ticketed every year; and they're not like port wine, you must remember, they don't improve with keeping."

Tom Ryfe had plenty of time to revolve his speculations, matrimonial and otherwise, during his journey to Ecclesfield Manor by one of those mid-day trains so irritating to through-

passengers, which stop at intermediate stations, dropping brown-paper parcels, and taking up old women with baskets. He reviewed many little affairs of the heart in which he had lately been engaged, without, however, suffering his affections to involve themselves too deeply for speedy withdrawal. He reflected with great satisfaction on his own fastidious rejection of several "suitable parties," as he expressed it, who did not quite reach his standard of aristocratic perfection, remembering how Mrs. Blades, the well-to-do widow, with fine eyes and a house in Duke Street, had fairly landed him but for that unfortunate dinner at which he detected her eating fish with a knife; how certain grated-looking needle-marks on Miss Glance's left forefinger had checked him just in time while in the act of kissing her hand; and how, on the very eve of a proposal to beautiful Constance De Courcy, whose manner, bearing, and appearance, no less than her name, denoted the extreme of refinement and high birth, he had sustained a shock, galvanic but

salutary, from her artless exclamation, "Oh my! whatever shall I do? If here isn't Pa!"

"No," thought Tom, as he rolled on into the fair expanse of down country that lay for miles round Ecclesfield, "I haven't found one yet quite up to the pattern I require. When I do I shall go in and win, that's all. I don't see why my chance shouldn't be as good as another's. I'm not such a bad-looking chap when I'm dressed and my hair's greased. I can do tricks with cards like winking. I can ride a bit, shoot a bit—'specially pigeons—dance a bit, and make love to 'em no end. I've got the gift of the gab, I know, and I stick at nothing. That's what the girls like, and that's what will pull me through when I find the one I want. Another station, and not there yet! What a slow train this is!"

It was a slow train, and Tom arriving at Ecclesfield, saw on the face of the servant who admitted him that he was too late. In addition to the solemn and mysterious hush that pervades a house in which the dead lie yet un-

buried, a feeling of horror, the result of some unlooked-for and additional calamity, seemed to predominate; and Tom was hardly surprised, however much he might be shocked, when the old butler gasped, in broken sentences, "Seizure —last night—quite unconscious—all over this morning. Will you take some refreshment, sir, after your journey?"

Mr. Bruce had been dead a few hours—dead without time to set his house in order, without consciousness even to wish his child good-bye.

She came down to see Mr. Bargrave's clerk that afternoon, pale, calm, collected, beautiful, but stern and unbending under the sorrow against which her haughty nature rebelled. In a few words, referring to a memorandum the while, she gave him her directions for the funeral and its ceremonies; desired him to ascertain at once the state of her late father's affairs, the amount of a succession to which she believed herself entitled; begged he would return with full information that day fortnight; ordered luncheon for him in the dining-

room; and so dismissed him as a bereaved queen might dismiss the humblest of her subjects.

Tom Ryfe, returning to London by the next train, thought he had never felt so small; and yet, was not this proud, sorrowing, and beautiful young damsel the ideal he had been seeking hitherto in vain? It is not too much to say that for twenty miles he positively *hated* her, striving fiercely against the influence, which yet he could not but acknowledge. In another twenty, his good opinion of his best friend Mr. Ryfe reasserted itself. He had seen something of the world, and possessed, moreover, a certain shallow acquaintance with human nature, not of the highest class, so he argued thus:

"Women like what they are unaccustomed to. The Grand Duchess of Gerolstein makes love to a private soldier simply because she don't know what a private soldier is. This girl must have lived amongst a set of starched and stuck-up people who have not two ideas

beyond themselves and their order. She has never so much as seen a smart, business-like, active fellow, ready to take all trouble off her hands, and make up her mind for her before she can turn round—young, too, and not so bad-looking, though I dare say she's used to good-looking chaps enough. The man's game who went in for Miss Bruce would be this: constant attention to her interests, supreme disregard for her feelings, and never to let her have her own way for a moment. She'd be so utterly taken aback she'd give in without a fight. Why shouldn't I try my chance? It's a good spec. It must be a good spec. And yet, hang it! such a high-handed girl as that would suit *me* without a shilling. It dashed me a little at first; but I like that scornful way of hers I own. What eyes, too! and what hair! I wonder if I'm a fool. No; nothing's impossible; it's only difficult. What! London already? Ah! there's no place like town."

The familiar gas-lamps, the roll of the cabs,

the bustle in the streets, dispelled whatever shadows of mistrust in his own merits remained from Tom's reflections in the railway carriage; and long before he reached his uncle's house, he had made up his mind to "go in," as he called it, for Miss Bruce, morally confident of winning, yet troubled with certain chilling misgivings, as fearing that *this* time he had really fallen in love.

Many and long, during the ensuing week, were the consultations between old Bargrave and his nephew as to the future prospects of the lady in question. Her father had died without a will. That fact seemed pretty evident, as he had often expressed his intention of preparing such an instrument, but had hitherto moved no further in the matter.

"Depend upon it, Tom," said his uncle, that very evening over their port wine, "he wouldn't go to anybody else. He was never much of a business-man, and he couldn't have disentangled his affairs sufficiently to make 'em clear, except to me. It's a sad pity for many reasons, but

I'm just as sure there's no will as I am that my glass is empty. Help yourself, Tom, and pass the wine."

"Then she takes as next of kin," said Tom, thinking of Maud's dark eyes, and filling his glass. "Here's her health!"

"By all means," assented Bargrave. "Her very good health, poor girl! But as to the succession I have my doubts; grave doubts. There's a trust, Tom. I looked over the deed while you were down there to-day. It is so worded that a male heir might advance a prior claim. There *is* a male heir, a parson in Dorsetshire, not a likely man to give in without a fight. We'll look at it again to-morrow. If it reads as I think, I wouldn't give a pinch of snuff for the young lady's chance."

Tom's face fell. "Can't we fight it, uncle?" said he, stoutly, applying himself once more to the port; but Bargrave had drawn his silk handkerchief over his face, and was already fast asleep.

So uncle and nephew went into the trust-deed, morning after morning, arriving in its perusal at a conclusion adverse to Miss Bruce's interest; but then, as the younger man observed, "the beauty of our English law is, that you can always fight a thing even if you haven't a leg to stand on."

It was almost time for Tom Ryfe's return journey to Ecclesfield, and a coat ordered for the express purpose of captivating Miss Bruce had actually come home, when the post brought him a little note from that lady, which afforded him, as such notes often do, an absurd and overweening joy. It was bordered with the deepest black, and ran as follows:—

"Dear Sir,

("*Dear* sir," thought Tom, "ah! that sounds much sweeter than plain sir")—I venture to trouble you with a commission in the nature of business. A packet, containing some diamond ornaments belonging to me, will be left by the jeweller at Mr. Bargrave's

office to-morrow. Will you kindly bring it down with you to Ecclesfield?

"Yours, very obediently,

"MAUD BRUCE."

Tom kissed the signature. He was very far gone already, and took care to be at the office in time to receive the diamonds. That boy was out of the way, of course! So Tom summoned the grimy Dorothea to his presence.

"I shall be busy for an hour," said he; "don't admit anybody unless he comes by appointment, except it's a man with a packet of jewellery. Take it in yourself, and bring it here at once. I've got to carry it down with me to-night by the train. Do you understand?"

"Is it a long journey as you're a-goin', sir?" asked Dorothea. "I should like to clean up a-bit while you was away."

"Only to Bragford," answered Tom; "but I might not be back for a day or two. Mind about the parcel, though," he added, in the

exuberance of his spirits. "The thing's valuable. It's for a young lady. It's jewels, Dorothea. It's diamonds!"

"Lor!" said Dorothea, going back to her scrubbing forthwith.

The jeweller, being dilatory, Tom had finished his letters before that artificer arrived, thus saving Dorothea all responsibility in the valuable packet confided to his charge, for Mr. Ryfe received it himself in the outer office, whither he had resorted in a fidget to compare a time-table with a railway map of England. He fretted to set off at once. He had finished his business; he had nothing to do now but eat an early dinner at his uncle's, and so start by the afternoon train on the path of love, triumph, and success, leaving the boy, coerced by ghastly threats, to take charge of the office in his absence.

We have all seen a bird moulting, draggled, dirty, woe-begone, not to be recognized for the same bird, sleek and glossy in its holiday-suit of feathers, pruning its wing for a flight

across the summer-sky. Even so different was the Dorothea of the unkempt hair, the soapy arms, the dingy apron, and the grimy face, from a gaudy damsel who emerged in the afternoon sun out of Mr. Bargrave's chambers, bright with all the colours of the rainbow, and scrupulously dressed, according to the extreme style of the last prevailing fashion but two.

She was a good-looking woman enough now that she had "cleaned herself," as she expressed it, but for a certain roughness of hair, coarseness of skin, and general redundancy of outline, despite of which drawbacks, however, she attracted many admiring glances from cab-drivers, omnibus-conductors, a precocious shoe-black, and the policeman on duty, as she tripped into Holborn and mingled with the living stream that flows unceasingly down that artery of London.

Dorothea seemed to know where she was going well enough, and yet the coarse red cheek turned pale while she approached her goal, though it was but a flashy, dirty-looking

gin-shop, standing at a corner where two streets met. Her colour rose though, higher than before, when a potboy, with a shock of red hair, and his shirt-sleeves rolled up to his shoulders, thus accosted her:

"You're just in time, miss; he'd 'a been off in a minit, but old Batters, he come in just now, and your young man stopped to take his share of another half-quartern."

CHAPTER IV.

GENTLEMAN JIM.

THERE is no reason, because a woman is coarse, hard-working, low-born, and badly-dressed, she should be without that inconvenient feminine appendage—a heart. Dorothea trembled and turned pale when the door of the Holborn gin-shop swung open and the man she most wished to see in all the world stood at her side.

He would have been a good-looking fellow enough in any rank of life, but to Dorothea, and others of her class, his clear, well-cut features and jetty ringlets rendered him an absolute Adonis, despite the air of half-drunken

bravado and assumed recklessness which marred a naturally resolute expression of countenance. He wore a fur cap, a velveteen jacket, and a bright-red neckcloth, secured by an enormous ring; nor was this remarkable costume out of character with the perfume he exhaled, denoting he had consumed at least his share of that other half-quartern which postponed his departure.

Dorothea slipped her arm in his, and clung to him with the fond tenacity of a woman who loves heart and soul, poor thing, to her cost.

His manner was an admirable combination of low-class gallantry with pitying condescension.

"Why, Doll," said he, "what's up now? You don't look hearty, my lass. Step in and take a dram; it'll do you good."

She glanced admiringly in the comely dissipated face.

"Ah! they may well call you Gentleman Jim," she answered; "you're fit to be a lord of the land, you are; and so you would, if I

was queen. But I doesn't want you to treat me, Jim, leastways not this turn; I wants you to come for a walk, dear. I've a bit of news for you. It's business, Jim," she added, somewhat ruefully, "or I wouldn't go for to ask."

His face, which had fallen a little, assuming that wearied expression a woman ought most to dread on the face she cares for, brightened considerably.

"Come on, lass!" he exclaimed, "business first, and pleasure arter. Speak up, and let's hear all about it."

They had turned from the main thoroughfare into a dark and quiet bye-street. She crossed her work-worn hand on his arm, and proceeded nervously—

"You say I never put you on a job, Jim. Well, I've a job to put you on now. I don't half like it, dear. It's for your sake I don't half like it. Promise me as you'll be careful, very careful, this turn."

"Bother!" answered Jim. "Stow that, lass, and let's have it out."

Thus elegantly adjured, Doll, as he called her, obeyed without delay, though her voice faltered and her colour faded more than once while she went on.

"You told me as you wouldn't love me without I kep' my ears open, and my eyes too. Well, Jim, I've watched and watched old master and young, like a cat watches a mouse-hole, till I've been that sick and tired I could have set down and cried. Now, to-day I wanted to see you so bad, at any rate, and, thinks I, here's a bit of news as my Jim will like to learn. Look, now: young master, he's a goin' to a place they call Bragford by the five o'clock train. Oh, I mind the name well enough. You know, Jim, you always bid me take notice of names. Well, it's Bragford. Bragford, says he, quite plain, an' as loud as I'm a-speakin' now."

"Forty-five miles from London," answered Jim, "and not ten minutes' walk from the branch line. Well?"

"He's a takin' summut down for a young

lady," continued Doll. "It is but a small package, what you might put in your coat-pocket, or your hat. Oh, Jim! Jim! if you should chance on a stroke of luck this turn, won't you give the trade up for good and all? If you and me had but a roof to cover us, I wouldn't ask better than only liberty to work for you till I dropped."

Tears stood in her eyes, and for a moment the face that looked up into the ruffian's was almost beautiful in its expression of entire devotion and trust.

He had taken a doubtful cigar from his coat-pocket, and was smoking thoughtfully.

"Small," said he, "then it ought, by rights, to be valuable. Did ye get a feel of it, Doll, or was it only a smell?"

"He took it hisself out of the jeweller's hands," answered Doll; "but I hadn't no call to be curious, for he told me what it was free enough. There ain't no smell about diamonds, Jim."

"Nor you can't swear to them neither,"

replied Jim, exultingly. "Diamonds, Doll! you're *sure* he said diamonds? Come, you *have* done it, my lass. Give us a kiss, Doll, and let's turn in here at the Sunflower, and drink good luck to the job."

The woman acceded to both proposals readily enough, but followed her companion into the ill-favoured little tavern with a weary step and a heavy heart. Some unerring instinct told her, no doubt, that she was giving all and taking nothing, offering gold for silver, truth for falsehood, love and devotion for a mere liking, rapidly waning to indifference and contempt.

Tom Ryfe, all anxiety to find himself once more in the same county with Miss Bruce, was in good time, we may be sure, for the train that should carry him down to Ecclesfield. Bustling through the station to take his ticket, he was closely followed by a well-dressed person in a pair of blue spectacles, travelling apparently without luggage or impediments of any description. This individual

seemed also bound for Bragford, and showed some little eagerness to travel in the same carriage with Tom, who attributed the compliment to his lately-constructed coat and general appearance as a swell of the first water. "He don't often get such a chance," thought Mr. Ryfe, accepting with extreme graciousness the other's civilities as to open windows and change of seats. He even went so far as to take a proffered cigar from the case of his fellow-traveller, which he would have smoked forthwith, but for the peremptory objections of a crusty old gentleman, who arrived at the last moment, encumbered with such a paraphernalia of railway-rugs, travelling-bags, books, newspapers and magazines, as denoted the through passenger, not to be got rid of at any intermediate station. The old gentleman glared defiance, but made himself comfortable nevertheless; and the presence of this common enemy was a bond of union to render the two chance acquaintances more than ordinarily cordial and communicative.

Smoking being prohibited, they had not proceeded many miles into the country ere the gentleman in spectacles produced a box of lozenges from his pocket, and, selecting one for his own consumption, offered another, with much suavity, to Tom Ryfe, surveying meanwhile, with inquisitive glances, the bulge in that gentleman's breast-pocket, where he carried his valuable package; but here again both were startled, not to say irritated, by the dictatorial interference of the last arrival.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," said this irrepressible old man, "I cannot permit it. Damn me, sir!" turning full round upon Tom Ryfe, "I *won't* permit it! I can detect the smell of chloroform in those lozenges. Smell, sir, I've the smell of a bloodhound. I could hunt a scamp all over England by nose—by nose, I tell you, sir, and worry him to death when I ran into him; and I *would*, too. Now, sir, if *you* choose to be chloroformed, I don't. I'm not anxious to be taken out of this compartment as stupid as an owl, and as cold as a

cabbage, with a pain in my eyes, a singing in my ears, and a scoundrel's hands in my waistcoat pockets. Excuse me, sir, I'm warm—I wouldn't give much for a chap that wasn't —and I speak my mind!"

It seemed a bad speculation to quarrel with him, this big, burly, resolute, and disagreeable old man. Tom Ryfe, for once, was at a nonplus. He murmured a few vague sentences of dissent, while the passenger in spectacles, consigning his lozenges to an inner pocket, buried himself in the broad sheet of the "Times."

But it was his turn now, and not even thus could he escape. Staring grimly at him, over the top of the paper, his tormentor fired a point-blank question, from which there was no refuge.

"Pray, sir," said he, "are you a chemist?"

The gentleman in spectacles signified, by a shake of the head, that was not his profession.

"Then, sir," continued the other, "do you know anything about chemistry—volatile es-

sences, noxious drugs, subtle poisons? I do." (Here Tom Ryfe observed his ally turn pale.) "Permit me to remark, sir, that if *you* don't, you are like a schoolboy carrying a pocketful of squibs and crackers on the fifth of November, unconscious that a single spark may blow him into the Christmas holidays before he can say 'knife!' Let me see those lozenges, sir—let me have them in my hand; I'll tell you in five seconds what they're made of, and how, and where, and why."

Here the man in spectacles, with considerable presence of mind, threw the whole of his lozenges out of window, under cover of the "Times."

"You frighten me, sir," said he; "I wouldn't keep such dangerous articles about me on any consideration."

The old gentleman executed an elaborate wink, denoting extreme satisfaction, at Tom Ryfe. "If you were going through," said he, "I could tell you some funny stories. Queer tricks upon travellers I've seen in my time.

Why I was the first person to find out the sinking floor dodge in West Street. My evidence transported three people for life, and a fourth for fifteen years. I once saw a man pulled down by the heels through a grating in one of the busiest streets in the City, and if I *hadn't* seen him he would never have come up alive. Why the police apply to me for advice many a time when people are missing. 'Don't distress yourselves,' says I, 'they'll turn up, never fear.' And they *do* turn up, sir, in nineteen cases out of twenty. In the twentieth, when there's foul play, we generally know something about it within eight-and-forty hours. Bragford? Is it? You get out here, do you? Good-morning, gentlemen; I hope you've enjoyed your jaunt."

Then as Tom, collecting great-coats, newspapers, &c., followed his new acquaintance out of the carriage, this strange old gentleman detained him for an instant by the arm.

"Friend of yours, sir?" said he, pointing to the man in spectacles on the platform. "Never

saw him before? I thought so. Sharper, sir, I'll take my oath of it, or something worse. I know the sort; I've exposed hundreds of them. Take my advice, sir, and never see him again."

With that the train glided on, leaving Mr. Ryfe and the gentleman in spectacles staring at each other over a basket of fish and a portmanteau.

"Mad!" observed the latter, with an uneasy attempt at a laugh, and a readjustment of his glasses.

"Mad, no doubt," answered Tom, but followed the lunatic's counsel, nevertheless, so far as to refrain from offering the other a lift in the well-appointed brougham, with its burly coachman, waiting to convey him to Ecclesfield Manor, though his late fellow-traveller was proceeding in that direction on foot.

Tom had determined to sleep at the Railway Hotel, Bragford, ere he returned to London next day. This arrangement he considered more respectful than an intrusion on the hospitality of Ecclesfield, should it be offered

him. Perhaps so scrupulous a regard for the proprieties mollified Miss Bruce in his favour, and called forth an invitation to tea in the drawing-room when he had concluded the solitary dinner prepared for him after his journey.

Tom Ryfe was always a careful dresser. Up to forty most men are. It is only when we have nobody to please that we become negligent of pleasing. I believe, though, that never in his life did he tie his neckcloth or brush his whiskers with more care than on the present occasion in a large and dreary chamber known to the household as one of the "best bed-rooms" of Ecclesfield Manor.

Tom looked about him, with a proud consciousness that at last his foot was on the ladder he had wanted all his life to climb. Here he stood, actually dressing for dinner, a welcome guest in the house of an old-established county family, on terms of confidence, if not intimacy, with its proud and beautiful female representative, in whose cause he was about to do battle with all the force of

his intellect, and (Tom began to think she could make him fool enough for anything) all the resources of his purse. The old family pictures—sad daubs, or they would never have been consigned to the bedrooms—simpered down on him with encouraging benignity. Prim women, wearing enormously long waists, and their heads a good deal on one side, pointed their fans at him, while he washed his hands, with a coquetry irresistible, had their colours only stood, combining entreaty and command; while a jolly old boy in flowing wig, steel breastplate, and the most convivial of noses, smiled in his face, as who should say, "*Audaces Fortuna juvat!*—Go in, my hearty, and win if you can!"

What was there in these surroundings, in the orderly decorum of the well-regulated mansion, in the chiming of the stable clock, nay, in the reflection of his own person shown by that full-length glass, to take the starch, as it were, out of Tom's self-confidence, turning his moral courage limp and helpless for the

nonce, bringing insensibly to his mind the familiar refrain of "Not for Joseph?" What was there that bade him man himself against this discouragement, as true bravery mans itself against the sensation of fear? and why should he be less worthy of approbation than other spirits who venture on "enterprises of great pith and moment" with beating hearts, indeed, but with unflinching courage and a dogged determination to succeed?

Had Tom been a young knight arming for a tournament, in which the good fortune of his lance was to win him a king's daughter for his bride, he might have claimed to be an admirable and interesting hero. Was he, indeed, a less respectable adventurer, that for steel he had to substitute French polish, for surcoat and corslet, broadcloth and cambric—that the battle he was to wage must be fought out by tenacity of purpose and ingenuity of brain, rather than strength of arm and downright hardness of skull?

He shook a little too much scent on his

handkerchief as he finished dressing, and walked down stairs in a state of greater agitation than he would have liked to admit.

Dinner was soon done. Eaten in solitude with grave servants watching every mouthful, he was glad to get it over. In a glass of brown sherry he drank Miss Bruce's health, and thus primed, followed the butler to the drawing-room, where that lady sat working by the light of a single lamp.

The obscurity was in his favour. Tom made his bow and accepted the chair offered him, less awkwardly than was to be expected from the situation.

Maud looked very beautiful with the light falling on her sculptured chin, her fair neck, and white hands, set off by the deep shadows of the mourning dress she wore.

I believe he was going to begin by saying "it had been a fine day," but she stopped him in her clear, cold voice, with its patrician accent, so difficult to define, yet so impossible to mistake.

"I have to thank you, Mr. Ryfe, for taking such care of my jewels. I hope the man left them at your office as he promised, and that you had no further trouble about them."

He wanted to say that "no errand of hers could be a trouble to *him*," but the words stuck in his throat, or she would hardly have proceeded so graciously.

"We must go into a few matters of business this evening, if you have got the papers you mentioned. I leave here to-morrow, and there is little time to spare."

He produced a neatly-folded packet, docketed and carefully tied with tape. The sight of it roused his energies, as the shaking of a guidon rouses an old trooper. Despite of the enchantress and all her glamour, Tom was himself again.

"Business is my trade, Miss Bruce," said he, briskly. "I must ask your earnest attention for a quarter of an hour, while I explain our position as regards the estate. At present it appears beset with difficulties. That's my look

out. Before we begin," added Tom, with a diffident faltering of voice, partly natural, partly assumed, "forgive my asking your future address. It is indispensable that we should frequently communicate, and—and—I cannot help hoping and expressing my hope for your happiness in the home you have chosen."

Maud's smile was very taking. She smiled with her eyes, those dark, pleasing eyes that would have made a fool of a wiser man than Tom.

"I am going to Aunt Agatha's," she said. "I am to live with her for good. I have no home of my own now."

The words were simple enough—spoken, too, without sadness or bitterness as a mere abstract matter of fact, but they aroused all the pen-and-ink chivalry in Tom's nature, and he vowed in his heart to lay goose-quill in rest on her behalf, with the devotion of a Montmorency or a Bayard.

"Miss Bruce," said he, resolutely, "the battle is not yet lost. In our last, of the 15th, we

advised you that the other side had already taken steps to oppose our claims. My uncle has great experience, and I will not conceal from you that my uncle is less sanguine than myself; but I begin to see my way, and if there is a possibility of winning, by hook or by crook, depend upon it, Miss Bruce, win we *will*, for our own sakes, and—and—for *yours!*"

The last two words were spoken in a whisper, being indeed a spontaneous ebullition, but she heard them nevertheless. In her deep sorrow, in her friendless, homeless position there was something soothing and consolatory in the sympathy of this young man, lawyer's clerk though he were, as she insisted with unnecessary repetition to herself. He showed at his best, too, while explaining the legal complications involved in the whole business, and the steps by which he hoped eventually to succeed. Maud was too thoroughly a woman not to admire power, and Tom's intellect possessed obviously no small share of that quality, when directed on such matters as the present. In

half an hour he had furnished her with a lucid statement of the whole case, and in half an hour he had inspired her with respect for his opinion, admiration of his sagacity, and confidence in his strength—not a bad thirty minutes' work. At its conclusion, she shook hands with him cordially when she wished him good-night. Tom was no fool, and knew when to venture as when to hold back. He bowed reverentially over the white hand, muttering only—"God bless you, Miss Bruce! If you think of anything else, at a moment's notice I will come from the end of the world to serve you,"—and so hurried away before she could reply.

CHAPTER V.

THE CRACKSMAN'S CHECKMATE.

PUCKERS, or Miss Puckers, as she liked to be called below-stairs, was a little puzzled by her young mistress's abstraction, while she brushed out Maud's wealth of raven hair for the night. Stealing glances at herself in the glass opposite, she could not help observing the expression on Miss Bruce's face. The light was in it once more that had been so quenched by her father's death. Puckers, who, in the housekeeper's room, had discussed the affairs of the family almost hourly ever since that sorrowful event, considered that it must have left his daughter in the possession

of untold wealth, and that "the young man from town," as she designated Tom Ryfe, was sent down expressly to afford the heiress an estimate of her possessions. A true lady's-maid, she determined to hazard the inquiry.

"I suppose, miss," said she, brushing viciously, "we shan't be going to your aunt's now quite so soon. I'm sure I've been that hurried and put about, I don't scarce know which way to turn."

"Why?" asked Maud, quietly. "Not so hard, please."

"Well, miss, a lady is not like a servant, you know; she can do as she chooses, of course. But if I was *you*, miss, I'd remain on the spot. There's the new furniture to get; there's the linen to see to; there's the bailiff given warning; and that there young man from town, I suppose *he* wouldn't come if we could do without him, charging goodness knows what, as if his very words was gold. But I give you joy, miss, of your fortune, I do. I was a sayin', only last night, was it? to Mrs. Plummer, says

I, 'Whatever *my* young lady will do,' says I, 'in a house where she isn't mistress, she that's been used to rule in her poor ma's time, and her pa's, ah! ever since she cut her teeth almost;' and Mrs. Plummer says, says she ——"

"That'll do, Puckers," observed Miss Bruce, "I shall not want you any more. Good-night."

She took as little notice of her handmaid's volubility as if the latter had been a grey parrot, and dismissed her with a certain cold, imperial manner that none of the household ever dreamt it possible to dispute or disobey; but after Puckers, with a quantity of white draperies over her arm, had departed to return no more, she sat down at the dressing-table, and began to think with all her might.

Her maid was a fool, no doubt: all maids were; but the shaft of folly, shot at random, went home to the quick. "A house where she wasn't mistress!" Had she ever considered the future shelter offered her by Aunt Agatha in that light? Here at the Manor, for as long as she could remember, had she not reigned

supreme? All the little arrangements of dinner-parties, picnics, archery-meetings, and such gatherings as make up country society, had fallen into her hands. Mamma didn't care—mamma never cared how anything was settled so long as papa was pleased; and papa thought Maud could not possibly do wrong. So by degrees—and this at an age when young ladies are ordinarily in the schoolroom—Miss Bruce had grown, on all social questions, to be the virtual head of the family. It was a position of which, till the time came to abdicate, she had not sufficiently appreciated the value. It seemed so natural to order carriages and horses at her own hours, to return visits, to receive guests, to do the honours of a comfortable country-house with an adequate establishment, and now, could she bear to live with Aunt Agatha, on sufferance?—Aunt Agatha, whom she had never liked, and whom she only refrained from snubbing and setting down, because they so seldom met, but when the elder lady had been invited by the younger as a

guest! "To be dependent," thought Maud, mentally addressing the beautiful face in the glass. "How should you like that? *you* with your haughty head, and your scornful eyes, and your hard, unbending heart? I know you! Nobody knows you but me! And I know how *bad* you are—how capricious, and how cruel! When you want anything, do you ever spare anybody to get it? Did you ever love any one on earth as well as your own way? Even mamma? Oh! mamma, dear, dear mamma, if you had lived I might have got better—I *was* better, I know I was better while I was with *you*. But now—now I must be myself. I can't help it. After all, it is not my fault. What is it I most covet and desire in the world? It is power. Rank, wealth, luxury—these are all very well as accessories of life; but how should I loathe and hate them if they were conditional on my thinking, as other people thought, or doing what I was told! I ought to have been a man. Women are such weak, vapid, idiotic characters, in

general—at least, all I meet down here. Engrossed with their children, their parishes, their miserable household cares and perplexities. While in London, I believe there are women who actually lead a party and turn out a minister. But they are beautiful, of course. Well—and me? I don't think I am so much amiss. With my looks and the position I ought to have, surely I might hold my own with the best of them. But what good will my looks do me if I am to be a dependent on Aunt Agatha? No. Without the estate I am nothing. With it I might be *anything*. This lawyer thinks he can win it for me. I wonder if he knows. How clever he seems! and how thoughtful! Nothing escapes him, and nothing seems to take him by surprise. And yet what a fool I could make of him if I chose. I saw it before he had been five minutes in the room. I wonder now what he thinks of *me!*—whether he has the presumption to suppose I could ever allow him to betray what he cared for me. I believe I should rather admire

his impudence! It is pleasant to be cared for, even by an inferior; and, after all, this Mr. Ryfe is not without his good points. He has plenty of talent and energy, and I should think audacity. By his own account he sticks at nothing, when he means winning, and he certainly means to win for me if he can. I never saw anybody so eager, so much in earnest. Perhaps he thinks that if he could come to me and say, 'There, Miss Bruce, I have saved your birthright for you, and I ask nothing but one kind word in return,' I might be disposed to give it, and something more. Well, I don't know. Perhaps it would be as good a way as any other of getting into favour. One thing is certain. The inheritance I must preserve at every sacrifice. Dear me, how late it is! I ought to have been in bed hours ago. Puckers, is that you?"

Puckers did not answer, and a faint rustle in the adjoining room, which had called forth Miss Bruce's question, ceased the instant she spoke aloud.

This young lady was not nervous; far from it; yet her watch seemed to tick with extraordinary vigour, and her heart to beat harder than common while she listened.

The door of communication between the two rooms was closed. Another door in the smaller apartment opened to the passage, but this, she remembered, was habitually locked on the inside. It couldn't be Puckers, therefore, who thus disturbed her mistress's reflections, unless that handmaiden had come down the chimney, or in at the window.

In this smaller room Miss Bruce kept her riding-habits, her ball-dresses, her draperies of different fabric, her transparencies of all kinds, and her jewels.

The house was very silent—so silent, that in the distant corridors were distinctly audible those faint and ghostly footfalls, which traverse all large houses after midnight. There were candles burning on Maud's toilet-table, but they served rather to show how dismal were the shadowy corners of the large, lofty bed-

room, than to afford light and confidence to its inmate.

She listened intently. Yes; she was sure she heard somebody in the next room—a step that moved stealthily about; a noise as of woodwork skilfully and cautiously forced open.

One moment she felt frightened. Then her courage came back the higher for its interruption. She could have escaped from her own room into the passage, easily enough, and so alarmed the house; but when she reflected that its fighting garrison consisted only of an infirm old butler—for the footman was absent on leave—there seemed little to be gained by such a proceeding, if violence or robbery were really intended. Besides, she rather scorned the idea of summoning assistance till she had ascertained the amount of danger.

So she blew her candle out, crept to the door of the little room, and laid her hand noiselessly on its lock.

Softly as she turned it, gently as she pushed the door back on its hinges inch by inch, she

did not succeed in entering unobserved. The light of a shaded lantern flashed over her the instant she crossed the threshold, dazzling her eyes indeed, yet not so completely but that she made out the figure of a man standing over her shattered jewel-box, of which he seemed to have been rifling the contents. Quick as thought, she said to herself, "Come, there is only one! If I can frighten *him* more than he frightens *me*, the game is mine."

The man swore certain ghastly oaths in a whisper, and Maud was aware of the muzzle of a pistol covering her above the dark lantern.

She wondered why she wasn't frightened, not the least frightened—only rather angry and intensely determined to save the jewels, and have it out.

She could distinguish a dark figure behind, the spot of intense light radiating round her own person, and perceived, besides, almost without looking, that an entrance had been made by the window, which stood wide open to disclose the topmost rounds of a garden-

ladder, borrowed doubtless from the tool-house, propped against its sill.

What the housebreaker saw was a vision of dazzling beauty in a flood of light. A pale, queenly woman, with haughty, delicate face, and loops of jet-black hair, falling over robes of white, erect and dauntless, fronting his levelled weapon without the slightest sign of fear.

He had never set eyes on such a sight as this; no, neither in circus nor music-hall, nor gallery of metropolitan theatre at Christmas. For a moment he lost his head—for a moment he hesitated.

In that moment Miss Bruce showed herself equal to the occasion.

Quick as thought, she made one step to the window, pushed the ladder outwards with all her force, and shut down the sash. As it closed, the ladder, poising for an instant, fell with a crash on the gravel below.

"Now," she said, quietly, "you are trapped and taken. Better make no resistance, for the

gamekeepers watching below are a rough sort of people, and I do not wish to see you ill-treated."

The man was aghast! What could it all mean? Was he awake or dreaming? She must be well backed, he said to himself, to assume such a position as this; and she looked so beautiful—so beautiful!

The latter consideration was not without its effect on him, even in the exercise of his profession. "Gentleman Jim," as his mates affirmed in their nervous English, became a fool of the deepest crimson dye whenever a woman was concerned, and this woman was in his eyes as an angel of light.

Nevertheless, instinctively rather than of intention, he muttered hoarsely—

"Drop it, miss, I warn you. One word out loud and I'll shoot, as sure as you stand there."

"Shoot away!" she answered with perfect composure; "you will save me the trouble of giving an alarm. They expect it, and are

waiting for it every moment below stairs. Light those candles, and let us see what damage you have done before you return the plunder."

A pair of wax-candles stood on the chimney-piece, and he obeyed mechanically, wondering at himself the while. His cunning, however, had not entirely deserted him, and he left his pistol lying on the table, ready to snatch it away if she tried to take possession. It was thus he gauged her confidence, and seeing she scarcely noticed the weapon, argued that powerful assistance must be near at hand to render this beautiful young lady so arbitrary and so unconcerned. His admiration burst out in spite of his discomfiture and critical position.

"Well, you *are* a cool one!" he exclaimed, in accents of mingled vexation and approval. "A cool one and a stunner, I'm blessed if you ain't! No offence, but I never see your likes yet, not since I was born. Come, miss, let's cry quits. You pass me out o' this on the

quiet. I dessay as I can make shift to get down without the ladder, an' I'll leave all these here gimcracks just as I found 'em. Now I've seen ye once, I'm blessed if I'd take so much as an ear-drop, unless it was in the way of a keepsake. Pass me out, miss, and I'll promise —no, I'm blowed if I think as I *can* promise— never to come here no more."

Undisguised admiration — the admiration always acceptable to a woman when accompanied with respect—shone in Gentleman Jim's dark eyes. He seemed under a spell, and while he acknowledged its strength, had no power, nay, had no wish, to resist its influence. When on such jobs as these it was his habit to observe an unusual sobriety. He was glad now to think of his adherence to that rule. Had he been drunk, he might, peradventure, have insulted this divinity. What had come over him? He felt almost pleased to know he was in her power, and yet she treated him like the dirt beneath her feet.

"No insolence, sir," she said, in a command-

ing voice. "Let me see, first of all, that every one of my trinkets is in its place. There, that bracelet would have brought you money; those diamonds would have been valuable if you could have got them clear off. You must have learned your trade very badly to suppose that with such things in the house we keep no guard. Come, I am willing to believe that distress brought you to this. Listen. You are in my power, and I will show you mercy. If I give you five pounds now, on the spot, and let you go, will you promise to try and get your bread as an honest man?"

The tears came in his eyes. This woman, then, that looked so like an angel, was angel all through. Yet, touched as he felt in his better nature, the proletary instinct bade him try once more if her effort to get rid of him originated in pity or fear, and he muttered, "Guineas! make it guineas, miss, and I'll say 'done.'"

"Not a shilling more, not a farthing," she answered, moving her hand as if to put it on

the bell-pull. "It cannot matter to me," she added, in a tone of the most complete indifference, "but while I am about it I think I would rather be the making of an honest man than the destruction of a rogue."

Her acting was perfect. She seemed so cold, so impassive, so completely mistress of the position, and all the time her heart was beating as the gambler's beats albeit in winning vein, ere he lifts the box from off the imprisoned dice—as the lion-tamer's beats while he spurns in its very den the monster that could crush him with a movement, and that yet he holds in check by an imaginary force, irresistible only so long as it is unresisted.

Such situations have a horrible fascination of their own. I have even known them prolonged to gratify a morbid thirst for excitement; but I think Miss Bruce was chiefly anxious to be released from her precarious position, and to get rid of her visitor as soon as she could. Even her resolute nerves were beginning to give way, and she knew her

own powers well enough to mistrust a protracted trial of endurance. Feminine fortitude is so apt to break down all at once, and Miss Bruce, though a courageous specimen of her sex, was but a woman who had wrought herself up for a gallant effort, after all.

She was quite unprepared though for its results. Gentleman Jim snatched up his pistol, stowed it away in his breast-pocket, as if heartily ashamed of it, brought out from that receptacle a pearl necklace and a pair of coral ear-rings, dashed them down on the table with an imprecation, and looking ridiculously sheepish, thus delivered himself—

"Five pounds, miss! Five devils! If ever I went for to ask five shillings of you, or five fardens, may the hands rot off at my wrists and the teeth drop out of my head. Strike me blind, now, this moment, in this here room, if I'd take so much as a pin's head that you valued, not if my life depended on it and there wasn't no other way of getting a morsel of bread! Look ye here, miss. No offence;

I'm but a rough-and-ready chap and you're a lady. I never come a-nigh one afore. Now I know what they mean when they talk of a real lady, and I see what it is puts such a spirit into them swells as lives with the likes of you. But a rough chap needn't be a blind chap. I come in here for to clean out your jewel-box. I tell ye fair, I don't think as I meant to have ill-treated you, and now I know as I *couldn't* have done it, but I wanted them gimcracks just the same. If so be as you'd like to see me shopped and lagged, you take and ring that there bell, and look if I go for to move a foot from this blessed spot. There! If so be as you bid me walk out free from that there winder, take and count these here now at once, and see there's not one missing and not one broke. Say the word, miss—which is it to be?"

The reaction was coming on fast. Maud dared not trust her voice, but she pointed to the window with a gesture in which she preserved an admirable imitation of confidence

and command. Gentleman Jim threw up the sash, but paused ere he ventured his plunge into the darkness outside.

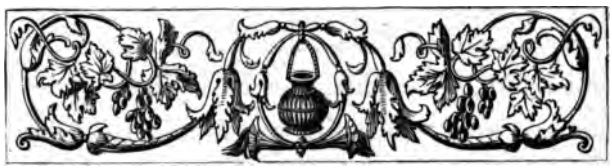
"Look ye ere, miss," he muttered in a hoarse whisper with one leg over the ledge, "if ever you wants a chap to do you a turn, don't ye forget there's one inside this waistcoat as will take a leap in a halter any day to please ye. You drop a line to 'Gentleman Jim' at the Sunflower, High Holborn. Oh! I can read, bless ye, and write and cipher too. What I says I sticks to. No offence, miss. I wonder will I ever see you again?"

He darted back for an instant, much to Maud's dismay, snatched a knot of ribbon which had fallen from her dress on the carpet, and was gone.

She heard his leap on the gravel below, and his cautious footsteps receding towards the park. Then she passed her hands over her face and looked about her as one who wakes from a dream.

"It was an escape I suppose," she said, "and

I ought to have been horribly frightened; yet I never seemed to lose the upper hand with him for a moment. How odd that even a man like that should be such a fool! No wiser and no cooler than Mr. Ryfe. What is it, I wonder; what is it, and how long will it last?"



CHAPTER VI.

A REVERSIONARY INTEREST.

ALTHOUGH Dorothea could assume on occasions so bright an exterior as I have in a previous chapter endeavoured to describe, her normal state was undoubtedly that which is best conveyed by the epithet "grimy." Old Mr. Bargrave, walking serenely into his office at eleven, and meeting this handmaiden on the stairs, used to wonder how so much dirt could accumulate on the human countenance, when irrigated, as Dorothea's red eyelids too surely testified, by daily tears. Yes, she had gone about her work of late with a heavy heart and a moody brow. Hers was at

best a dull, dreary life, but in it there grew a noxious weed which she was pleased to cherish for a flower. Well, it was withering every day before her eyes, and all the tears she could shed were not enough to keep it alive. Ah! when the ship is going down under our very feet, I don't think it much matters what may be our rank and rating on board. The cook's mate in the galley is no less dismayed than the admiral in command. Dorothea's light, so to speak, was only a tallow-candle, yet to put it out was to leave the poor woman very desolate in the dark. So Mr. Bargrave ventured one morning to ask if she felt quite well; but the snappish manner in which his inquiries were met, as though they masked a load of hidden sarcasm and insult, caused the old gentleman to scuffle into his office with unusual activity, much disturbed and humiliated, while resolved never so to commit himself again.

Into that office we must take the liberty of following him, tenanted as it is only by himself and Tom Ryfe.

The latter, extremely well dressed, wears a posy of spring flowers at his buttonhole, and betrays in his whole bearing that he is under some extraneous influence of an unbusiness-like nature. Bargrave subsides into his leather chair with a grunt, shuffles his papers, dips a pen in the inkstand, and looks over his spectacles at his nephew.

"Waste of time, waste of capital, Tom," says he, with some irritation. "Mind, I washed *my* hands of it from the first. You've been at work now for some months; that's *your* look-out, and it's been kept apart and separate from the general business—that's *mine*."

"I've got Tangle's opinion here," answered Tom; "I won't ask you to look at it, uncle. He's dead against us. Just what you said six months back. There's no getting over that trust-deed, nor through it, nor round it, nor any way to the other side of it. I've done *my* d—dest, and we're not a bit better off than when we began."

He spoke in a cheerful, almost an exulting tone, quite unlike a man worsted in a hard and protracted struggle.

"I'm sorry for the young lady," observed Bargrave, "but I never expected anything else. It's a fine estate and it must go to the male heir. She has but a small settlement, Tom, very inadequate to her position, as I told poor Mr. Bruce many a time. He used to say everything would be set right by his will, and now one of these girls is left penniless, and the other with a pittance, a mere pittance, brought up, as I make no doubt she was, to believe herself an heiress."

"One of them!" exclaimed Tom. "What do you mean?"

"Why, that poor thing who was born a few weeks too soon," answered Bargrave. "She's totally unprovided for. With regard to Miss Bruce, there is a settlement. Two hundred a year, Tom, for life, nothing more. I told you so when you undertook the job. And now who's to pay your costs?"

"Not you, uncle," answered Tom, flippantly, "so don't distress yourself on that score."

"I don't, indeed," observed Bargrave, with emphasis. "You've had your own time to work this, on the understanding, as you know, that it was to be worked at your own risk. I haven't interfered; it was no affair of mine. But your costs will be heavy, Tom, I can't help seeing that. Tangle's opinion don't come so cheap, you see, though it's word for word the same as mine. I would have let *you* have it for nothing, and anybody else for six and eightpence."

"The costs *will* be heavy," answered Tom, still radiant. "I should say a thou. wouldn't cover the amount. Of course, if we can't get them from the estate, they must come out of my pocket."

Bargrave's eyebrows were raised. How the new school went ahead, he thought. Here was this nephew of his talking of a thousand pounds with an indifference verging on contempt. Well, that was Tom's look-out; never-

theless, on such a road it would be wise to establish a halting-place, and his tone betrayed more interest than common while he asked—

"You won't take it into Chancery, Tom, will you?"

The younger man laid his forefinger to the side of his nose, winked thrice with considerable energy, lifted his hat from its peg, adjusted his collars in the glass, nodded to his uncle, muttering briefly, "Back in two hours," and vanished.

Old Bargrave looked after him with a grim, approving smile. "Boy or man," said he, aloud, "that chap always knew what he was about. Tom can be safely trusted to take care of Number One."

He was wrong, though, on the present occasion. If Mr. Ryfe did indeed know what he was about, there could be no excuse for the enterprise on which he had embarked. He was selfish. He would not have denied his selfishness, and indeed rather prided himself on that quality; yet behold him now waging a

contest in which a man wastes money, time, comfort, and self-respect, that he may wrest from real sorrow and discomfiture the shadow of a happiness which he cannot grasp when he has reached it. There is much wisdom in the opinion expressed by a certain fox concerning grapes hanging out of distance; but it is a wisdom seldom acquired till the limbs are too stiff to stretch for an effort—till there is scarce a tooth left in the mumbling jaws to be set on edge.

Tom Ryfe had allowed his existence to merge itself in another's. For months, as devotedly as such natures can worship, he had been worshipping his ideal in the person of Miss Bruce. I do not say that he was capable of that highest form of adoration which seeks in the first place the unlimited sovereignty of its idol, and which, as being too good for them, women constantly undervalue; but I do say that he esteemed his fair client the most beautiful, the most attractive, and the most perfect of her sex, resolving that for him she

was the only woman in the world, and that in defiance of everything, even her own inclinations, he would win her if he could.

In Holborn there is always a hansom to be got at short notice. "Grosvenor Crescent," says Tom, shutting the half-doors with a bang, and shouting his orders through the little hole in the top. So to Grosvenor Crescent he is forwarded accordingly, at the utmost speed attainable by a pair of high wheels, a well-bred "screw," and a rough-looking driver with a flower in his mouth.

There are several peculiarities, all unreasonable, many ridiculous, attending the demeanour of a man in love. Not the least eccentric of these are his predatory instincts, his tendency to prowl, his preference for walking over other modes of conveyance, and his inclination to subterfuge of every kind as to his ultimate destination. Tom Ryfe was going to Belgrave Square; why should he direct his driver to set him down a quarter of a mile off? why overpay the man by a shilling? why wear down the

soles of an exceedingly thin and elaborate pair of boots on the hot, hard pavement without compunction? Why? Because he was in love. This was also the reason, no doubt, that he turned red and white when he approached the square railings; that his nose seemed to swell, his mouth got dry, his hat felt too tight, and the rest of his attire too loose for the occasion; also that he affected an unusual interest in the numbers of the doors, as though meditating a ceremonious morning call, while all the time his heart was under the laburnums in the centre of the square gardens, at the feet of a haughty, handsome girl, dressed in half-mourning, with the prettiest black-laced parasol to be found on this side of the Rue Castiglione, for love—of which, indeed, as the gift of Mr. Ryfe, it was a type—or money, which, not having been yet paid for, it could hardly be said to represent.

That heart of his gave a bound when he saw it in her hand as she sailed up the broad gravel-walk to let him in. He was almost

happy, poor fellow, for almost a minute, not distressing himself to observe that the colour never deepened a shade on her proud, pale cheek; that the shapely hand, which fitted its pass-key to the lock, was firm as a dentist's, and the clear, cold voice that greeted him far steadier than his own.

It is a choice of evils, after all, this favourite game of cross-purposes for two. To care more than the adversary entails worry and vexation; to care less makes a burthen of it, and a bore.

"Thank you so much for coming, Miss Bruce—Maud," said Tom, passionately. "You never fail, and yet I always dread, somehow, that I shall be disappointed."

"I keep my word, Mr. Ryfe," answered the young lady, with perfect self-possession; "and I am quite as anxious as you can be, I assure you. I want so to know how we are getting on."

He showed less discouragement than might have been expected. Perhaps he was used to this *sang-froid*, perhaps he rather liked it, believing it, in his ignorance, a distinctive mark

of class, not knowing—how should he?—that, once excited, these thoroughbred ones are, of all racers, the least amenable to restraint.

"I have bad news, he said," tenderly. "Miss Bruce, I hardly like to tell you that I fear we cannot make out case enough to come into court. I took the opinion of the first man we have. I am sorry to say he gives it against us. I am not selfish," he added, with real emotion, "and I am sorry, indeed, for your sake, dearest Miss Bruce."

He meant to have called her "Maud;" but the beautiful lips tightened, and the delicate eyebrows came down very straight and stern over the deep eyes in which he had learned to read his fate. He would wait for a better opportunity, he thought, of using the dear, familiar name.

She took small notice of his trouble.

"Has there been no mismanagement?" she asked, almost angrily; "no papers lost? no foul play? Have you done your best?"

"I have, indeed," he answered, meekly.

"After all, is it not for my own interest as much as yours? Are they not henceforth to be in common?"

She ignored the question altogether; she seemed to be thinking of something else. While they paced up and down a walk screened from the square windows by trees and shrubs already clothed in the tender, quivering foliage of spring, she kept silence for several seconds, looking straight before her with a sterner expression than he could yet remember to have seen on the face he adored. Presently she spoke in a hard, determined voice—

"I *am* disappointed. Yes, Mr. Ryfe, I don't mind owning I am bitterly and grievously disappointed. There, I suppose it's not your fault, so you needn't look black about it; and I dare say you did the best you could afford at the price. Well, I don't want to hurt your feelings—your *very* best, then. And yet it seems very odd—you were so confident at first. Of course if the thing's really gone, and there's no chance left, it's folly to think about it. But

what a future to lose—what a future to lose! Mr. Ryfe, I can't stay with Aunt Agatha—I can't and I won't! How she could ever find anybody to marry her! Mr. Ryfe, speak to me. What had I better do?"

Tom would have given a round sum of money at that moment to recall one of the many imaginary conversations held with Miss Bruce, in which he had exhausted poetry, sentiment, and forensic ardour for the successful pleading of his suit. Now he could find nothing better to say than that "he had hoped she was comfortable with Mrs. Stanmore; and anybody who didn't make Miss Bruce comfortable must be brutal and wicked. But—but—if it was really so—and she could be persuaded —why, Miss Bruce must long have known—" And here the voice of Tom, the plausible, the prudent, the self-reliant, degenerated to a husky whisper, because he felt that his very heart was mounting to his throat.

Miss Bruce cut him exceedingly short.

"You remember our bargain," she said,

bitterly. "If you don't, I can remind you of it. Listen, Mr. Ryfe; I am not going to cheat you out of your dues. You were to win back my fortune from the next of kin—this cousin who seems to have law on his side. You charged yourself with the trouble—that counts for nothing, it is in the way of your business—with the costs—the expenses—I don't know what you call them—these were to be paid out of the estate. It was all plain sailing, if we had conquered; and there was an alternative in the event of failure. I accepted it. But I tell you, not till every stratagem has been tried, every stone turned, every resource exhausted, do I acknowledge the defeat, nor—I speak plain English, Mr. Ryfe—do I pay the penalty."

He turned very pale. "You did not use this tone when we walked together through the snow in the avenue at Ecclesfield. You promised of your own accord, you know you did," said poor Tom, trembling all over; "and I have got your promise in writing locked up in a tin box at home."

She laughed a hard, shrill laugh, not without some real humour in it, at his obvious distress.

"Keep it safe in your tin box," said she, "and don't be afraid, when the time comes, that I shall throw you over. Ah! what an odd thing money is; and how it seems able to do everything!" She was looking miles away now, totally unconscious of her companion's presence. "To me this five or six thousand a year represents hope, enjoyment, position—all that makes life worth having. More, to lose it is to lose my freedom, to lose all that makes life endurable!"

"And you *have* lost it," observed Tom, doggedly. He was very brave, very high-minded, very chivalrous in any way; but he possessed the truly British quality of tenacity, and did not mean to be shaken off by any feminine vagaries where once he had taken hold.

"Et je payerais de ma personne," replied Miss Bruce, scornfully. "I don't suppose you know any French. You must go now,

Mr. Ryfe; my maid's coming back for me from the bonnet-shop. I can't be trusted, you see, over fifty yards of pavement and a crossing by myself. The maid is walking with me now behind these lilac-bushes you know. Her name is Ryfe. She is very cross and silent; she wears a well-made coat, shiny boots, rather a good hat, and carries a nosegay as big as a chimney-sweep's—you can give it me if you like—I dare say you bought it on purpose."

How she could twist and turn him at will! three or four playful words like these, precious all the more that her general manner was so haughty and reserved, caused Tom to forget her pride, her whims, her various caprices, her too palpable indifference to himself. He offered the flowers with humble gratitude, ignoring resolutely the presumption that she would probably throw them away before she reached her own door.

"Good-bye, Miss Bruce," said he, bowing reverently over the slim hand she vouchsafed him, and "Good-bye," echoed the young lady,

adding, with another of those hard little laughs that jarred so on Tom's nerves, "Come with better news next time, and don't give in while there's a chance left; depend upon it the money's better worth having than the client. By-the-by, I sent you a card for Lady Goldthred's this afternoon—only a stupid breakfast —Did you forget it?"

"Are you going?" returned Tom, with the clouds clearing from his brow.

"Perhaps we shall, if it's fine," was the reply. "And now I can't wait any longer. Don't forget what I told you, and do the best you can."

So Tom Ryfe departed from his garden of Eden with sundry misgivings not entirely new to him, that the fruit he took such pains to ripen for his own gathering might but be gaudy wax-work after all, or painted stone, perhaps, cold, smooth, and beautiful, against which he should rasp his teeth in vain.

The well-tutored Puckers, dressed in faded splendour, and holding a brown-paper parcel

in her hand, was waiting for her young lady at the corner of the square.

While thus engaged she witnessed a bargain, of an unusual nature, made apparently under extraordinary pressure of circumstances. A ragged boy, established at the crossing, who had indeed rendered himself conspicuous by his endeavours to ferry Puckers over dry-shod, was accosted by a shabby-genteel and remarkably good-looking man in the following vernacular—

"On this minnit, off at six, Buster; Two bob an' a bender, and a three of eye-water, in?"

"Done for another joey," replied Buster, with the premature acuteness of youth foraging for itself in the streets of London.

"Done," repeated the man, pulling a handful of silver from his pocket, and assuming the broom at once to enter on his professional labours, ere Puckers had recovered from her astonishment, or Buster could vanish round the corner in the direction of a neighbouring mews.

Though plying his instrument diligently, the

man kept a sharp eye on the square gardens. When Tom Ryfe emerged through the heavy iron gate he whispered a deep and horrible curse, but his dark eyes shone and his whole face beamed into a ruffianly kind of beauty, when after a discreet pause, Miss Bruce followed the young lawyer through the same portal. Then the man went to work with his broom harder than ever. Not Sir Walter Raleigh spreading his cloak at the feet of his sovereign mistress lest they should take a speck of mud could have shown more loyalty, more devotion, than did Gentleman Jim sweeping for bare life, as Miss Bruce and her maid approached the crossing he had hired for the occasion.

Maud recognized him at a glance. Not easily startled or surprised, she bade Puckers walk on, while she took a half-crown from her purse and put in the sweeper's hand.

"At least it is an honest trade," said she, looking him fixedly in the face.

The man turned pale while he received her bounty.

"It's not that, Miss," he stammered. "It's not that—I only wanted to get a look of ye. I only wanted just to hear the turn of your voice again. No offence, Miss, I'll go away now. Oh! can't ye give a chap a job? It's my heart's blood as I'd shed for you, free—and never ask no more nor a kind word in return!"

She looked him over from head to foot once more and passed on. In that look there was neither surprise, nor indignation, nor scorn, only a quaint and somewhat amused curiosity, yet this thief and associate of thieves, quivered, as if it had been a sun-stroke. When she passed out of sight he bit the half-crown till it bent, and hid it away in his breast. "I'll never part with ye," said he, "never;" unmindful of poor Dorothea, going about her work tearful and forlorn. Gentleman Jim, uneducated, besotted, half-brutalized as he was, had yet drunk from the cup that poisons equally the basest and noblest of our kind. A well-dressed, good-looking young man, walking on the other side of the square, did not fail to

witness Tom Ryfe's farewell and Maud's interview with the crossing-sweeper. He too looked strangely disturbed, pacing up and down an adjoining street more than once, before he could make up his mind to ring a well-known bell. Verily Miss Bruce seemed to be one of those ladies whose destiny it is to puzzle, worry, and interest every man with whom they come in contact.

CHAPTER VII.

DICK STANMORE.

SHE had certainly succeeded in puzzling Dick Stanmore and already began to interest him. The worry would surely follow in due time. Dick was a fine subject for the scalpel — good-humoured, generous, single-hearted, with faultless digestive powers, teeth, and colour to correspond, a strong tendency to active exercise, and such a faculty of enjoyment, as, except in the highest order of intellects, seldom lasts a man over thirty.

Like many of his kind, he *said* he hated London, but lived there very contentedly from April to July, nevertheless. He was fresh, just

at present, from a good scenting season in Leicestershire, followed by a sojourn on the Tweed, in which classical river he had improved many shining hours, wading waist-deep under a twenty-foot rod, any number of yards of line, and a fly of various hues, as gaudy, and but little smaller than a cock pheasant. Now he had been a week in town, during which period he met Miss Bruce at least once every day. This constant intercourse is to be explained in a few words.

Mrs. Stanmore, the Aunt Agatha with whom Maud expressed herself so unwilling to reside, was a sister of the late Mr. Bruce. She had married a widower with one son, that widower being old Mr. Stanmore, defunct, that son being Dick. Mrs. Stanmore, in the enjoyment of a large jointure (which rather impoverished her step-son), though arbitrary and unpleasant, was a woman of generous instincts, so offered Maud a home the moment she learned her niece's double bereavement; which home, for many reasons, heiress or no heiress, Miss Bruce

felt constrained to accept. Thus it came about that she found herself walking with Tom Ryfe *en cachette* in the Square gardens; and, leaving them, recognized the gentleman whom she was to meet at luncheon in ten minutes, on whose intellect at least, if not his heart, she felt pretty sure she had already made an impression.

"I won't show her up," said Tom to his neatest boots, while he scraped them at his mother's door; "but I *should* like to know who that bumptious-looking chap is, and what the h-ll she could have to say to him in the Square gardens all the same."

Mr. Stanmore's language at the luncheon-table, it is needless to say, was far less emphatic than that which relieved his feelings in soliloquy; nor was he to-day quite so talkative as usual. His mother thought him silent (he always called her "mother," and, to do her justice, she could not have loved her own son better, nor scolded him oftener, had she possessed one); Miss Bruce voted him stupid and sulky. She told him so.

"A merrythought, if you please, and no bread sauce," said the young lady, in her calm, imperious manner. "Don't forget I hate bread sauce, if you mean to come here often to luncheon; and do *say* something. Aunt Agatha can't, no more can I. Recollect we've got a heavy afternoon before us."

Aunt Agatha always contradicted. "Not heavier than any other breakfast, Maud," said she, severely. "You didn't think that tea at the Tower heavy last week, nor the ghosts in the mess-room of the Blues. Lady Goldthred's an old friend of mine, and it was very kind of her to ask us. Besides, Dick's coming down in the barouche."

Maud's face brightened, and, be sure, Dick saw it brighten.

"That accounts for it," said she, with the rare smile in her eyes; "and he thinks we shan't let him smoke, so he sulks beforehand, grim, grave, and silent as a ghost. Mr. Stanmore, cheer up. You may smoke the whole way down. *I'll* give you leave."

"Nonsense, my dear," observed Aunt Agatha, sternly. "He don't want to do anything of the kind. What have you been about, Maud, all the morning? I looked for you everywhere to help me with the visiting-list."

"Puckers and I took a 'constitutional,'" answered Miss Bruce, unblushingly. "We wanted to do some shopping." But her dark eyes stole towards Dick, and, although his never met them, she felt satisfied he had witnessed her interview with Tom Ryfe in the Square gardens.

"I saw you both coming in, Miss Bruce," said Dick, breaking the awkward pause which succeeded Maud's misstatement. "I think Puckers wears twice as smart a bonnet as yours. I hope you are not offended."

Again that smile from the dark eyes. Dick felt, and perhaps she meant him to feel, that he had lost nothing in her good opinion by ignoring even to herself that which she wished to keep unknown.

"I think you've very little taste in bonnets, whatever you may have in faces," answered the young lady; "and I think I shall go and put one on now that will make you eat your words humbly when I appear in it on the lawn at Lady Goldthred's."

"I have no doubt there won't be a dry eye in the place," answered Dick, looking after her, as she left the room, with undisguised admiration in his honest face—with something warmer and sweeter than admiration creeping and gathering about his heart.

So they all went down together in the barouche, Dick sitting with his back to the horses, and gazing his fill on the young beauty opposite, looking so cool and fair in her fresh summer draperies, so thoroughly in keeping with the light and sparkle of everything around —the brilliant sunshine, the spring foliage, the varying scenery, even to the varnish and glitter of the well-appointed carriage, and the plated harness on the horses.

Aunt Agatha conversed but sparingly. She

was occupied with the phantom pages of her banker's book; with the shortcomings of a new housemaid; not a little with the vague sketch of a dress, to be worn at certain approaching gaieties, which should embody the majesty of the chaperon without entirely resigning all pretensions to youth. But for one remark, "that the coachman was driving very badly," I think she travelled in stately silence as far as Kew. Not so the other occupants of the barouche. Maud, desirous of forgetting much that was distasteful to her in the events of the morning, and, indeed, in the course of her daily life, resolved to accept the tangible advantages of the present, nor scrupled to show that she enjoyed fresh air, fine weather, and pleasant company. Dick, stimulated by her presence, and never disinclined to gaiety of spirit, exerted himself to be agreeable, pouring forth a continuous stream of that pleasant nonsense which is the only style of conversation endurable in the process of riding, driving, or other jerking means of locomotion.

It is only when his suit has prospered that a man feels utterly idiotic and moonstruck in the presence of the woman he adores. Why, when life is scarce endurable but at her side, he should become a bore in her presence, is only another intricacy in the many puzzles that constitute the labyrinth of love. So long as he flutters unsinged about its flame, the moth is all the happier for the warmth of the candle, all the livelier for the inspiration of its rays. Dick Stanmore, turning into the Kensington road, was the insect basking in those bright, alluring beams; but Dick Stanmore on the further side of Kew felt more like the same insect when its wings have been already shrivelled and its powers of flight destroyed in the temerity of its adoration.

Still it was pleasant, very pleasant. She looked so beautiful, she smiled so kindly, always with her eyes, sometimes with the perfect, high-bred mouth; she entered so gaily into his gossip, his fancies, his jokes, allowing him to hold her parasol and arrange her shawls with

such sweetness and good-humour, that Dick felt quite sorry to reach the Portugal laurels and trim lawns of their destination, when the drive was over from which he had derived this new and unforeseen gratification. Something warned him that, in accordance with that rule of compensation which governs all terrestrial matters, these delights were too keen to last, and there must surely be annoyance and vexation in store to complete the afternoon.

His first twinge originated in the marked admiration called forth by Miss Bruce's appearance at the very outset. She had scarcely made her salaam to Lady Goldthred, and passed on through billiard-room, library, and verandah, to the two dwarfed larches and half-acre of mown grass which constitute the wilderness of a suburban villa, ere Dick felt conscious that his could be no monopoly ot adoration. Free trade was at once declared by glances, whispers and inquiries from a succession of well-dressed young gentlemen, wise doubtless in their own conceit, yet not wanting in

that worldly temerity which impels fools to rush in where angels fear to tread, and gives the former class of beings, in their dealings with that sex which is compounded of both, an immeasurable advantage over the latter.

Miss Bruce had not traversed the archery-ground twenty-five feet, from target to target, on her way to the refreshment tent, ere half a dozen of the household troops, a bachelor baronet, and the richest young commoner of his year were presented by her host, at their own earnest request. Dick's high spirits went down like the froth in a glass of soda-water, and he fell back discouraged, to exchange civilities with Lady Goldthred.

That excellent woman, dressed, painted, and wound-up for the occasion, was volubly delighted with everybody; and being by no means sure of Dick's identity, dashed the more cordiality into her manner, while careful not to commit herself by venturing on his name.

"*So* good of you to come," she fired it at

him as she had fired it at fifty others, "all this distance from town, and such a hot day, to see my poor little place. But isn't it pretty now? And are we not lucky in the weather? And weren't you smothered in dust coming down? And you've brought *the* beauty with you too. I declare Sir Moses is positively smitten. I'm getting quite jealous. Just look at him now. But he's not the only one, that's a comfort."

Dick *did* look, wondering vaguely why the sunshine should have faded all at once. Sir Moses, a little bald personage, in a good-humoured fuss, whom no amount of inexperience could have taken for anything but the "man of the house," was paying the utmost attention to Miss Bruce, bringing her tea, placing a camp-stool for her that she might see the archery, and rendering her generally those hospitable services which it had been his lot to waste on many less attractive objects during that long sunny afternoon.

"Sir Moses is always so kind," answered

Dick, vaguely, "and nobody's breakfasts are so pleasant as yours, Lady Goldthred."

"I'm *too* glad you think so," answered his hostess, who, like a good-hearted woman as she was, took enormous pains with these festivities, congratulating herself, when she washed off her rouge, and doffed her robes of ceremony at night, that she had got through the great penance of her year. "You're always so good-natured. But I *do* think men like to come here. The country air, you know, and the scenery, and plenty of pretty people. Now, there's Lord Bearwarden—look, he's talking to Miss Bruce, under the cedar—he's actually driven over from Windsor, and though he's a way of being so fine and *blasé* and all that, he don't look much bored at this moment, does he? Twenty thousand a year they say, and been everywhere and done everything. Now, I fancy, he wants to marry, for he's much older, you know, than he looks. To hear him talk, you'd think he was a hundred, and broken-hearted into the bargain. For my

part, I've no patience with a melancholy man; but then I'm not a young lady. You know him, though, of course."

Dick's reply, if he made one, was drowned in a burst of brass music that deafened people at intervals throughout the afternoon, and Lady Goldthred's attention wandered to fresh arrivals, for whom, with fresh smiles and untiring energy, she elaborated many more remarks of a similar tendency.

Dick Stanmore *did* know Lord Bearwarden, as every man about London knows every other man leading the same profitable life. There were many whom he would have preferred as rivals; but thinking he detected signs of weariness on Maud's face (it had already come to this, that he studied her countenance, and winced to see it smile on any one else), he crossed the lawn, that he might fill the place by her side to which he considered himself as well entitled as another.

His progress took some little time, what with bowing to one lady, treading on the dress

of another, and parrying the attack of a third who wanted him to give her daughter a cup of tea, so that by the time Dick reached her Lord Bearwarden had left Miss Bruce to the attentions of another guest, more smart than gentlemanlike, in whose appearance there was something indefinably out of keeping with the rest. Dick started. It was the man with whom he had seen Maud walking before luncheon in the Square.

People were pairing for a dance on the lawn, and Mr. Stanmore, wedged in by blocks of beauty and mountains of muslin, could neither advance nor retreat. It was no fault of his that he overheard Miss Bruce's conversation with the stranger.

"*Will* you dance with me?" said the latter, in a whisper of suppressed anger, rather than the tone of loving entreaty with which it is customary to urge this pleasant request.

"Impossible!" answered Maud, energetically. "I'm engaged to Lord Bearwarden—it's the Lancers, and he's only gone to make up the set."

The man ground his teeth and knit his brows.

"You seem to forget," he muttered—"you carry it off with too high a hand. I have a right to bid you dance with me. I have a right, if I chose, to order you down to the river there and row you back to Putney with the tide; and I *will*, I swear, if you provoke me too far."

She seemed to keep her temper with an effort.

"*Do* be patient," she whispered, glancing round at the bystanders. "Surely you can trust me. Hush! here comes Lord Bear-warden."

And taking that nobleman's arm, she walked off with a mournful, pleading look at her late companion, which poor Dick Stanmore would have given worlds to have seen directed to himself.

There was no more pleasure for him now during the rest of the entertainment. He did indeed obtain a momentary distraction from his

resolution to ascertain the name of the person who had so spoilt his afternoon. It helped him very little to be told the gentleman was "a Mr. Ryfe." Nobody seemed to know any more, and even this information he extracted with difficulty from Lady Goldthred, who added, in a tone of astonishment—

"Why, you brought him, didn't you?"

Dick was mystified—worse, he was unhappy. For a few minutes he wandered about behind the dancers, watching Maud and her partner as they threaded the intricacies of those exceedingly puzzling evolutions which constitute the Lancer quadrilles. Lord Bearwarden was obviously delighted with Maud, and that young lady seemed by no means unconscious or careless of her partner's approval. I do not myself consider the measure they were engaged in threading as particularly conducive to the interchange of sentiment. If my memory serves me right, this complicated dance demands as close an attention as whist, and affords almost as few opportunities of communicating

with a partner. Nevertheless, there is a language of the eyes, as of the lips, and it was not Lord Bearwarden's fault if his looks were misunderstood by their object. All this Dick saw, and seeing, grew more and more disgusted with life in general, with Lady Goldthred's breakfast in particular. When the dance ended, and Dick Stanmore—hovering about his flame, like the poor moth to which I have compared him, once singed and eager to be singed again—was hesitating as to whether he, too, should not go boldly in and try his chance, behold Mr. Ryfe with an offensive air of appropriation walks off with Miss Bruce arm-in-arm, towards the sequestered path that leads to the garden-gate, that leads to the shady lane, that leads to the shining river!

It was all labour and sorrow now. People who called this sort of thing amusement, thought Dick, would go to purgatory for pastime, and a stage farther for diversion. When he broke poor Redwing's back three fields from home in the Melton steeple-chase

he was grieved, annoyed, distressed. When he lost that eleven-pounder in the shallows below Melrose, because "Aundry," his Scottish henchman, was too drunk to keep his legs in a running stream, he was angry, vexed, disgusted; but never before, in his whole life of amusement and adventure, had he experienced anything like the combination of uncomfortable feelings that oppressed him now. He was ashamed of his own weakness, too, all the time, which only made matters worse.

"Hang it!" thought Dick, "I don't see why I should punish myself by staying here any longer. I'll tell my mother I must be back in London to dinner, make my bow, jump into a boat, and scull down to Chelsea. So I will. The scull will do me good, and if—if she *has* gone on the water with that snob, why I shall know the worst. What a strange, odd girl she is! And oh! how I wish she wasn't!"

But it takes time to find a lady, even of Mrs. Stanmore's presence, amongst five hundred of her kind jostled up in half an acre of ground;

neither will the present code of good manners, liberal as it is, bear a guest out in walking up to his hostess *à bout portant*, to interrupt her in an interesting conversation, by bidding her a solemn good-bye hours before anybody else has begun to move. Twenty minutes at least must have elapsed ere Dick found himself in a dainty outrigger with a long pair of sculls, fairly launched on the bosom of the Thames—more than time for the corsair, if corsair he should be, to have sailed far out of sight with false, consenting Maud in the direction of London Bridge.

Dick was no mean waterman. The exercise of a favourite art, combining skill with muscular effort, is conducive to peace of mind. A swim, a row, a gallop over a country, a fencing bout or a rattling set-to with "the gloves" bring a man to his senses more effectually than whole hours of quiescent reflection. Ere the perspiration stood on Dick Stanmore's brow, he suspected he had been hasty and unjust; by the time he caught his second wind, and had

got fairly into swing, he was in charity with all the world, reflecting, not without toleration and self-excuse, that he had been an ass.

So he sculled on, like a jolly young waterman, making capital way with the tide, and calculating that if the fugitive pair should have done anything so improbable as to take the water in company, he must have overhauled, or at least sighted them ere now.

His spirits rose. He wondered why he should have been so desponding an hour ago. He had made excuses for himself—he began to make them for Maud, nay, he was fast returning to his allegiance, the allegiance of a day, thrown off in five minutes, when he sustained another damper, such as the total reversal of his outrigger and his own immersion, head uppermost, in the Thames, could not have surpassed.

At a bend of the river near Putney he came suddenly on one of those lovely little retreats which fringe its banks—a red-brick house, a pretty flower-garden, a trim lawn, shaded by

weeping-willows, kissing the water's edge. On that lawn, under those weeping-willows, he descried the graceful, pliant figure, the raven hair, the imperious gestures that had made such havoc with his heart, and muttering the dear name, never before coupled with a curse, he knew for the first time, by the pain, how fondly he already loved this wild, heedless, heartless girl, who had come to live in his mother's house. Swinging steadily along in mid-stream, he must have been too far off, he thought, for her to recognise his features; yet why should she have taken refuge in the house with such haste, at an open window, through which a pair of legs clad in trousers denoted the presence of some male companion? For a moment he turned sick and faint, as he resigned himself to the torturing truth. This Mr. Ryfe, then, had been as good as his word, and she, his own proud, refined, beautiful idol, had committed the enormity of accompanying that imperious admirer down here. What could be the secret of such a man's influence over such

a girl? Whatever it was, she must be Dick's idol no longer. And he would have loved her so dearly!—so dearly!

There were tears in the eyes of this jolly young waterman as he pulled on. These things hurt, you see, while the heart is fresh and honest, and has been hitherto untouched. Those should expect rubbers who play at bowls; if people pull their own chestnuts out of the fire they must compound for burnt fingers; and when you wager a living, loving, trustful heart against an organ of wax, gutta-percha, or Aberdeen granite, don't be surprised if you get the worst of the game all through.

He had quite given her up by the time he arrived at Chelsea, and had settled in his own mind that henceforward there must be no more sentiment, no more sunshine, no more romance. He had dreamt his dream. Well for him it was so soon over. *Semel insanivimus omnes.* Fellows had all been fools once, but no woman should ever make a fool of him

again! No woman ever *could.* He should never see another like *her!*

Perhaps this was the reason he walked half a mile out of his homeward way, through Belgrave Square, to haunt the street in which she lived, looking wistfully into those gardens whence he had seen her emerge that very day with her mysterious companion—gazing with plaintive interest on the bell-handle, and door-scraper of his mother's house—vaguely pondering how he could ever bear to enter that house again—and going through the whole series of those imaginary throes, which are indeed real sufferings with people who have been foolish enough to exchange the dignity and reality of existence for a dream.

What he expected I am at a loss to explain; but although, while pacing up and down the street, he vowed every turn should be the last, he had completed his nineteenth, and was on the eve of commencing his twentieth, when Mrs. Stanmore's carriage rolled up to the door, stopping with a jerk, to discharge itself of that

lady and Maud, looking cool, fresh, and unrumpled as when they started. The revulsion of feeling was almost too much for Dick. By instinct, rather than with intention, he came forward to help them out, so confused in his ideas that he failed to remark how entirely his rapid retreat from the breakfast had been overlooked. Mrs. Stanmore seemed never to have missed him. Maud greeted him with a merry laugh, denoting more of good-humour and satisfaction than should have been compatible with keen interest in his movements or justifiable pique at his desertion.

"Why here you are!" she exclaimed gaily. "Actually home before us, like a dog that one takes out walking to try and lose. Poor thing! did it run all the way under the carriage with its tongue out? and wasn't it choked with dust, and isn't it tired and thirsty? and won't it come in and have some tea?"

What could Dick say or do? He followed her upstairs to the back drawing-room, meek and submissive as the dog to which she had

likened him, waiting for her there with a dry mouth and a beating heart while she went to "take off her things;" and when she reappeared smiling and beautiful, able only to propound the following ridiculous question with a gasp—

"Didn't you go on the water then after all?"

"On the water!" she repeated. "Not I. Nothing half so pleasant, I assure you. I wish we had! for anything so slow as the whole performance on dry land, I never yet experienced. I danced five dances, none of them nice ones—I hate dancing on turf—and I had a warm-water ice and some jelly that tasted of bees'-wax. What became of you? We couldn't find you anywhere to get the carriage. However, I asked Aunt Agatha to come away directly somebody made a move, because I was cross and tired and bored with the whole business. I think she liked it much better than I did; but here she is to answer for herself."

Dick had no dinner that day, yet what a pleasant cigar it was he smoked as he coasted

Belgrave Square once more in the sweet spring evening under the gas-lamps! He had been very unhappy in the afternoon, but that was all over now. Anxiety, suspicion, jealousy, and the worst ingredient of the latter, a sense of humiliation, had made wild work with his spirits, his temper, and indeed his appetite; yet twenty minutes in a dusky back drawing-room, a cup of weak tea and a slice of inferior bread and butter, were enough to restore self-respect, peace of mind, and vigour of digestion. He could not recal one word that bore an unusually favourable meaning, one look that might not have been directed to a brother or an intimate friend, and still he felt buoyed up with hope, restored to happiness. The reaction had come on, and he was more in love with her than ever.

CHAPTER VIII.

NINA.

IT might have spared Mr. Stanmore a deal of unnecessary discomfort had the owner of those legs which he saw through the open window at Putney thought fit to show the rest of his person to voyagers on the river. Dick would then have recognized an old college friend, would have landed to greet him with the old college heartiness, and in the natural course of events would have satisfied himself that his suspicions of Maud were unfounded and absurd.

Simon Perkins is not a romantic name, nor did the exterior of Simon Perkins, as seen

either within or without the Putney cottage, correspond with that which fiction assigns to a hero of romance. His frame was small and slight, his complexion pale, his hair weak and thin, his manner diffident, awkward, almost ungainly, but that its thorough courtesy and good-nature were so obvious and unaffected. In general society people passed him over as a shy, harmless, unmeaning little man; but those who really knew him affirmed that his courage was not to be damped, nor his nerve shaken, by extremity of danger—that he was always ready with succour for the needy, with sympathy for the sorrowful. In short, as they tersely put it, that "his heart was in the right place."

For half a dozen terms at Oxford he and Dick had been inseparable. Their intimacy, none the less close for dissimilarity of tastes and pursuits, since Perkins was a reading man and Dick a "fast" one, had been still more firmly soldered by a long vacation spent together in Norway, and a "thrilling tableau,"

as Dick called it, to which their expedition gave rise. Had Simon Perkins's heart been no stouter than his slender person, his companion must have died a damp death, and this story would never have been told.

The young men were in one of the most picturesque parts of that wild and beautiful country, created, as it would seem, for the express gratification of the fisherman and the landscape painter; Simon Perkins, an artist in his very soul, wholly engrossed by the sketch of a mountain, Dick Stanmore equally absorbed in fishing a pool. Scarce twenty yards apart, neither was conscious, for the moment, of the other's existence; Simon, indeed, being in spirit some seven thousand feet above the level of the sea, putting more ochre into the virgin snow that crested his topmost peak, and Dick deftly dropping a fly, the size of a pen-wiper, over the nose of a fifteen pounder that had already once risen to the gaudy lure.

Poising himself, like a Mercury, on a rock in mid stream, the angler had just thrown

eighteen yards of line lightly as a silken thread to an inch, when his foot slipped, and a loud splash, bringing the painter, like Icarus, out of the clouds with a run, startled his attention to the place where his companion was not. In another second Simon had his grip on Dick's collar, and both men were struggling for dear life in the pool. Stanmore could swim, of course, but it takes a good swimmer to hold his own in fisherman's boots, encumbered, moreover, with sundry paraphernalia of his art. Simon was a very mild performer in the water, but he had coolness, presence of mind, and inflexible tenacity of purpose. To these qualities the friends owed it that they ever reached the shore alive. It was a very near thing, and when they found their legs and looked into each other's faces, gasping, dripping, spouting water from ears, nose, and mouth, Dick gathered breath to exclaim, "You trump! I should have been drowned, to a moral!" Whereat the other, choking, coughing, and sputtering, answered faintly, "You old

muff! I believe we were never out of our depth the whole time!"

Perkins did not go up for his degree, and the men lost sight of one another in a few years, cherishing, indeed, a kindly remembrance each of his friend, yet taking little pains to refresh that remembrance by renewed intercourse. How many intimacies, how many attachments outlast a twelvemonth's break? There are certain things people go on caring for, but I fear they are more intimately connected with self in daily life than either the romance of friendship or the intermittent fever of love. The enjoyment of luxury, the pursuit of money-making, seem to lose none of their zest with advancing years, and perhaps to these we may add the taste for art.

Now to Simon Perkins art was as the very air he breathed. The greatest painter was, in his eyes, the greatest man that lived. When he left Oxford, he devoted himself to the profession of painting with such success as rendered him independent, besides enabling him

to contribute largely to the comfort of two maiden aunts with whom he lived.

Not without hard work; far from it. There is no pursuit, perhaps, which demands such constant and unremitting exertion from its votaries. The ideal to which he strains can never be reached, for his very successes keep building it yet higher, and a painter is so far like a baby his whole life through that he is always learning to *see*.

Simon was still learning to see on the afternoon Dick Stanmore sculled by his cottage windows—studying the effect of a declining sun on the opposite elms, not entirely averting his looks from that graceful girl, who ran into the house to the oarsman's discomfiture, and missing her more than might have been expected when she vanished upstairs. Was not the sun still shining bright on that graceful feathery foliage? He did not quite think it was.

Presently there came to the door a rustle of draperies, and an elderly lady, not remarkable

for beauty, entered the room. Taking no notice of Simon, she proceeded to arrange small articles of furniture with a restless manner that denoted anxiety of mind. At last, stopping short in the act of dusting a china tea-cup, with a very clean cambric handkerchief, she observed, in a faltering voice, "Simon, dear, I feel so nervous I know I shall never get through with it. Where's your aunt Jemima?"

Even while she spoke there appeared at the door another lady, somewhat more elderly, and even less remarkable for beauty, who seated herself bolt upright in an elbow-chair without delay, and, looking austerely round, observed, in an impressive voice, "Susannah, fetch me my spectacles; Simon, shut the door."

Of all governments there must be a head. It was obvious that in this deliberative assembly Miss Jemima Perkins assumed the lead. Both commands being promptly obeyed, she pulled her spectacles from their case and put them on, as symbols of authority, forthwith.

"I want your advice, Simon," said this strong-minded old lady, in a hard, clear voice. "I dare say I shan't act upon it, but I want it all the same. I've no secrets from either of you; but as the head of the family I don't mean to shirk responsibility, and my opinion is, she must go. Susannah, no weakness. My dear, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Nina, run upstairs again, we don't want you just now."

This to a pretty head with raven hair, that popped saucily in, and as saucily withdrew.

Simon looked wistfully after the pretty head, and relapsed into a day-dream. Was he thinking what a picture it would make, or what a reality it was? His aunt's voice recalled him to facts.

"Simon," she repeated, "my opinion is she must go."

"Go!" said her nephew, vacantly, "what do you mean, aunt? Go?—where?—who?"

"Why that girl we're all so fond of," replied Miss Jemima, growing every moment more

severe. "Mr. Algernon used to come here twice every quarter, usedn't he? Never missed the day, did he? and paid his money as regular as clock-work. Susannah, how long is it since he's been to see us?"

Susannah sobbed.

"That's no answer," pursued the inflexible speaker. "To-morrow week it will be ten months since we have seen him; and to-morrow week it will be ten months since we've had a scrap of his handwriting. Is that girl to remain here, dependent on the bounty of a struggling artist and two old maids? My opinion is that she ought to go out and gain her own livelihood; my feeling is that—that—I couldn't bear to think of the poor dear in any home but this!"

Here the old lady, whose assumption of extreme fortitude had been gradually leading to the inevitable catastrophe, broke down altogether, while Susannah, giving rein to her emotions, lifted up her voice and wept.

"You knew who she was all along, Jemima,"

said the latter, gulping sadly at her syllables: "you know you did; and it's cruel to harrow up our feelings like this."

Simon said nothing, but on his homely features gathered an expression of resolve, through which there gleamed the bright radiance of hope.

Miss Perkins wiped her eyes and then her spectacles. Resuming her dignity, she proceeded in a calmer voice—

"I will not conceal from you, Susannah, nor from you, Simon, that I have had my suspicions for several years. Those suspicions became a certainty some time ago. There can be no doubt now of the relationship existing between our Nina and the Mr. Algernon, as he called himself, who took such an interest in the child's welfare. When I saw Mr. Bruce's death in the paper, I knew that our pet had lost her father. What was I to do? When I consented to take charge of the child twenty years ago—and a sweet pretty babe she was—I perfectly understood there must be a mystery

connected with her birth. As head of the family, I imparted my suspicions to neither of you, and I kept my conjectures and my disapproval to myself. This seemed only fair to my correspondent, only fair to the child. When I learned Mr. Bruce's death, it came upon me like a shot, that he was the Mr. Algernon who used to visit here, and who furnished such liberal means for the support and education of that girl upstairs.—Susannah, I cannot make myself understood if you will persist in blowing your nose! — Since Mr. Bruce's death no Mr. Algernon has darkened our doors, no remittances have come to hand with the usual signature. Simon, my impression is that no provision whatever has been made for the poor thing, and that our Nina is —is utterly destitute and friendless."

Here Miss Susannah gave a little scream, whereat her sister glared austerely, and resumed the spectacles she had taken off to dry.

"Not friendless, aunt," exclaimed Simon, in a great heat and fuss; "never friendless so

long as we are all above ground. I am perfectly willing to—stay, Aunt Jemima, I beg your pardon, what do you think ought to be done?"

The old lady smoothed her dress, looking round with placid dignity.

"I will first hear what you two have to propose. Susannah, leave off crying this minute, and tell us what you think of this—this *very* embarrassing position."

It is possible that but for the formidable adjective Susannah might have originated, and indeed expressed some idea of her own; but to confront a position described by her sister as "embarrassing" was quite beyond her powers, and she could only repeat feebly, "I'll give her half my money—I'll give her half my money. We can't drive her out into the cold." This with sobs and tears, and a hand pressed helplessly to her side.

Miss Jemima turned from her with contempt, declaring, in an audible whisper, she had "more than half a mind to send the

foolish thing to bed;" then looked severely her nephew.

"This girl," said he, "has become a memb of our family, just as if she were a boı relation. It seems to me there is no questic of feeling or sentiment or prejudice in tl matter. It is a mere affair of duty. We a bound to treat Nina Algernon exactly as she were a Perkins."

His aunt took his face in both her hanc squeezed it hard, and flattened his nose with grim kiss. After this feat she looked mo severe than ever.

"I believe you are right," she said; " believe this arrangement is a special duty sei on purpose for us to fulfil. I had made ι my mind on the subject before I spoke to yo but it is satisfactory to know that you boı think as I do. When we give way to oı feelings, Susannah, we are sure to be injudiciou sometimes even unjust. But duty is a neve failing guide, and—oh! my dears, to part wi that darling would be to take the very hea

out of my breast; and, Simon, I'm so glad you agree with me; and Susannah, dear, if I spoke harshly just now, it was for your own good; and—and—I'll just step up-stairs into the store-room, and look out some of the house-linen that wants mending. I had rather you didn't disturb me. I shall be down again to tea."

So the old lady marched out firmly enough, but sister and nephew both knew right well that kindly tears, long kept back from a sense of dignity, would drop on the half-worn house-linen, and that in the solitude of her store-room she would give vent to those womanly feelings she deemed it incumbent on her, as head of the family, to restrain before the rest.

Miss Susannah entertained no such scruples. Inflicting on her nephew a very tearful embrace, she sobbed out incoherent congratulations on the decision at which her elder sister had arrived.

"But we mustn't let the dear girl find it out," said this sensitive, weak-minded, but generous-hearted lady. "We should make no sort of difference in our treatment of her, of

course, but we must take great care not to let anything betray us in our manner. I am not good at concealment, I know, but I will undertake that she never suspects anything from mine."

The fallacy of this assertion was so transparent that Simon could not forbear a smile.

"Better make a clean breast of it at once," said he. "Directly there's a mystery in a family, Aunt Susannah, you may be sure there can be no union. It need not be put in a way to hurt her feelings. On the contrary, Aunt Jemima might impress on her that we count on her assistance to keep the pot boiling. Why, she's saving us pounds and pounds at this moment. Where should I get such a model for my Fairy Queen, I should like to know? It ought to be a great picture—a great picture, Aunt Susannah, if I can only work it out. And where should I be if she left me in the lurch? No—no; we won't forget the bundle of sticks. I'll to the maul-stick, and you and Aunt Jemima shall be as cross as two sticks; and as for Nina,

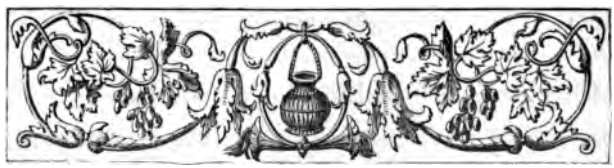
with her bright eyes, and her pleasant voice, and her merry ways, I don't know what sort of a stick we should make of her."

"A fiddlestick, I should think," said that young lady, entering the room from the garden window, having heard, it is to be hoped, no more than Simon's closing sentence. "What are you two doing here in the dark? It's past eight—tea's ready—Aunt Jemima's down—and everything's getting cold."

Candles were lit in the next room, and the tea-things laid. Following the ladies, and watching with a painter's eye the lights and shades as they fell on Nina's graceful beauty, Simon Perkins felt, not for the first time, that if she were to leave the cottage, she would carry away with her all that made it a dear and happy home, depriving him at once of past, present, and future, taking from him the very cunning of his handicraft, and, worse still, the inspiration of his art.

It was no wonder she had wound herself round the hearts of that quiet little family in

the retired Putney villa. As like Maud Bruce in form and feature, as though she had been her twin sister, Nina Algernon possessed the same pale, delicate features, the same graceful form, the same dark, pleading eyes and glossy raven hair; but Mr. Bruce's elder and unacknowledged daughter had this advantage over the younger, that about her there was a sweetness, a freshness, a quiet gaiety, and a *bonhommie* such as spring only from kindliness of disposition and pure unselfishness of heart. Had she been an ugly girl, though she might have lacked admirers, she could not have long remained without a lover. Being as handsome as Maud, she seemed calculated to rivet more attachments, while she made almost as many conquests. Between the sisters there was a similitude and a difference. One was a costly artificial flower, the other a real garden rose.



CHAPTER IX.

THE USUAL DIFFICULTY.

MAUD'S instincts, when, soon after her father's death, she felt a strong disinclination to live with Aunt Agatha, had not played her false. As inmates of the same house, the two ladies hit it off badly enough. Perhaps because in a certain imperiousness and hardness of character they were somewhat alike, their differences, though only on rare occasions culminating in a battle royal, smouldered perpetually, breaking out, more often than was seemly, in brisk skirmish and rapid passage of arms.

Miss Bruce's education during the lifetime

of her parents had been little calculated to fit her for the position of a dependant, and with all her misgivings, which, indeed, vexed her sadly, she could not yet quite divest herself of an idea that her inheritance had not wholly passed away. Under any circumstances she resolved before long to go at the head of an establishment of her own, so that she should assume her proper position, which she often told herself, with *her* attractions and *her* opportunities was a mere question of will.

Then, like a band of iron tightening round her heart, would come the thought of her promise to Tom Ryfe, the bitter regret for her own weakness, her own overstrained notions of honour, as she now considered them, in committing that promise to writing. She felt as people feel in a dream, when, step which way they will, an insurmountable obstacle seems to arise, arresting their progress, and hemming them in by turns on every side.

It was not in the best of humours that, a few days after Lady Goldthred's party, Maud

descended to the luncheon-table fresh from an hour's consideration of her grievances, and of the false position in which she was placed. Mrs. Stanmore, too, had just sent back a misfitting costume to the dressmaker for the third time; so each lady being, as it were, primed and loaded, the lightest spark would suffice to produce explosion.

While the servants remained it was necessary to keep the peace, but cutlets, mashed potatoes, and a ration of sherry having been distributed, the room was cleared, and a fair field remained for immediate action. Dick's train was late from Newmarket, and he was well out of it.

To do her justice, Maud had meant to intrench herself in sullen silence. She saw the attack coming, and prepared to remain on the defensive. Aunt Agatha began quietly enough —to borrow a metaphor from the noble game of chess, she advanced a pawn.

"I don't know how I'm to take you to Countess Monaco's to-night, Maud; that stupid woman has disappointed me again, and I've

got literally nothing to go in. Besides, there will be such a crush we shall never get away in time for my cousin's ball. I promised her I'd be early if I could."

Now Miss Bruce knew, I suppose because he had told her, that Lord Bearwarden would be at Countess Monaco's reception, but would not be at the said ball. It is possible Mrs. Stanmore may have been aware of this also, and that her pawn simply represented what ladies call "aggravation."

Maud took it at once with her knight. "I don't the least care about Countess Monaco's, aunt," said she. "Dick's not going because he's not asked, and I'm engaged to dance the first dance with him at the other place. It's a family bear-fight, I conclude; but though I hate the kind of thing, Dick is sure to take care of *me*."

Check for Aunt Agatha, whom this off-hand speech displeased for more reasons than one. It galled her to be reminded that her step-son had received no invitation from the smart

foreign countess; while that Maud should thus appropriate him, calling him "Dick" twice in a breath, was more than she could endure. So she moved her king out of position.

"Talking of balls," said she, in a cold, civil voice, "reminds me that you danced three times the night before last with Lord Bearwarden, and twice with Dick, besides going down with him to supper. I don't like finding fault, Maud, but I have a duty to perform, and I speak to you as if you were my own child."

"How can you be sure of that?" retorted incorrigible Maud. "You never had one."

This was a sore point, as Miss Bruce well knew. Aunt Agatha's line of battle was sadly broken through, and her pieces huddled together on the board. She began to lose her head, and her temper with it.

"You speak in a very unbecoming tone, Miss Bruce," said she, angrily. "You force me into saying things I would much rather keep to myself. I don't wish to remind you of your position in this house."

It was now Maud's turn to advance her strongest pieces—castles, rooks, and all.

"You remind me of it often enough," she replied, with her haughtiest air—an air which, notwithstanding its assumption of superiority, certainly made her look her best; "if not in words, at least in manner, twenty times a day. You think I don't see it, Mrs. Stanmore, or that I don't mind it, because I've too much pride to resent it as it deserves. I am indebted to you, certainly, for a great deal—the roof that shelters me, and the food I eat. I owe you as much as your carriage-horses, and a little less than your servants, for I do my work and get no wages. Never fear but I shall pay up everything some day; perhaps very soon. You had better get your bill made out, so as to send it in on the morning of my departure. I wish the time had come to settle it now."

Mrs. Stanmore was aghast. Very angry, no doubt, but yet more surprised, and perhaps the least thing cowed. Her cap, her laces, the lockets round her neck, the very hair of her

head, vibrated with excitement. Maud, cool, pale, impassible, was sure to win at last, waiting, like the superior chess player, for that final mistake which gives an adversary checkmate.

It came almost immediately. Mrs. Stanmore set down her sherry, because the hand that held her glass shook so she could not raise it to her lips. "You are rude and impertinent," said she; "and if you really think so wickedly, the sooner you leave this house the better, though you *are* my brother's child; and—and—Maud, I don't mean it. But how can you say such things? I never expected to be spoken to like this."

Then the elder lady began to cry, and the game was over. Before the second course came in a reconciliation took place. Maud presented a pale, cold cheek to be kissed by her aunt, and it was agreed that they should go to Countess Monaco's for the harmless purpose, as they expressed it, of "just walking through the rooms," leaving thereafter as soon as

practicable for the ball; and Mrs. Stanmore, who was good-hearted if bad-tempered, trusted "dear Maud would think no more of what she had said in a moment of irritation, but that they would be better friends than ever after their little tiff."

None the less, though, for this decisive victory did the young lady cherish her determination to settle in life without delay. Lord Bearwarden had paid her considerable attention on the few occasions they had met. True, he was not what the world calls a "marrying man;" but the world, in arranging its romances, usually leaves out that very chapter — the chapter of accidents—on which the whole plot revolves. And why should there not be a Lady Bearwarden of the present as of the past? To land so heavy a fish would be a signal triumph. Well, it was at least possible, if not probable. This should be a matter for future consideration, and must depend greatly on circumstances.

In the mean time, Dick Stanmore would

marry her to-morrow. Of that she felt sure. Why? Oh, because she did! I believe women seldom deceive themselves in such matters. Dick had never told her he cared for her; after all, she had not known him many weeks, yet a certain deference and softness of tone, a diffidence and even awkwardness of manner, increasing painfully when they were alone, betrayed that he was her slave. And she liked Dick, too, very much, as a woman could hardly help liking that frank and kindly spirit. She even thought she could love him if it was necessary, or at any rate make him a good wife, as wives go. He would live in London, of course, give up hunting and all that. It really might do very well. Yes, she would think seriously about Dick Stanmore, and make up her mind without more delay.

But how to get rid of Tom Ryfe? Ignore it as she might—strive as she would to forget it in excitement, dissipation, and schemes for the future, none the less was the chain always

round her neck. Even while it ceased to gall her she was yet sensible of its weight. So long as she owed him money, so long as he held her written promise to repay that debt with her hand, so long was she debarred all chances for the future, so long was she tied down to a fate she could not contemplate without a shudder. To be "a Mrs. Ryfe" when on the cards lay such a prize as the Bearwarden coronet, when she need only put out her hand and take Dick Stanmore, with his brown locks, his broad shoulders, his genial, generous heart, for better or worse! It was unbearable. And then to think that she could ever have fancied she liked the man; that, even now, she had to give him clandestine meetings, to see him at unseasonable hours, as if she loved him dearly, and was prepared to make every sacrifice for his sake! Her pride revolted, her whole spirit rose in arms at the reflection. She knew he cared for her too; cared for her in his own way very dearly; and "C'est ce que c'est d'être femme," I fear she hated him all the more!

So long as a woman knows nothing about him, her suspicion that a man likes her is nine points out of ten in his favour; but directly she has fathomed his intellect and probed his heart; squeezed the orange, so to speak, and resolved to throw away the rind, in proportion to the constancy of his attachment will be her weariness of its duration; and from weariness in such matters there is but one short step to hatred and disgust.

Tom Ryfe must be paid his money. To this conclusion, at least, Maud's reflections never failed to lead. Without such initiatory proceeding it was useless to think of demanding the return of that written promise. But how to raise the funds? After much wavering and hesitation, Miss Bruce resolved at last to pawn her diamonds. So dearly do women love their trinkets, that I believe, though he never knew it, Tom Ryfe was more than once within an ace of gaining the prize he longed for, simply from Maud's disinclination to part with her jewels. How little he dreamt that the very

packet which had helped to cement into intimacy his first acquaintance with her should prove the means of dashing his cherished hopes to the ground, and raising yet another obstacle to shut him out from his lovely client!

While Maud is meditating in the back drawing-room, and Aunt Agatha, having removed the traces of emotion from her eyes and nose, is trying on a bonnet up stairs, Dick Stanmore has shaken off the dust of a railway journey, in his lodgings, dressed himself from top to toe, and is driving his phaeton merrily along Piccadilly, on his way to Belgrave Square. How his heart leaps as he turns the well-known corner—how it beats as he skips into his stepmother's house—how it stops when he reaches the door of that back drawing-room, where, knowing the ways of the establishment, he hopes to find his treasure alone! The colour returns to his face. There she is in her usual place, her usual attitude, languid, graceful, indolent, yet glad to see him nevertheless.

"I'm in luck," said Dick, blushing like a schoolboy. "My train was late, and I was so afraid you'd be gone out before I could get here. It seems so long since I've seen you. And where have you been, and how's my mother, and what have you been doing?"

"What have *you* been doing, rather?" repeats the young lady, giving him a cool and beautiful hand that he keeps in his own as long as he dares. "Three days at Newmarket are long enough to make 'a man or a mouse,' as you call it, of a greater capitalist than you, Mr. Stanmore. Seriously, I hope you've had a good week."

"Only lost a pony on the whole meeting," answered Dick, triumphantly. "And even that was a 'fluke,' because Bearwarden's Bacchante filly was left at the post."

"I congratulate you," said Maud, with laughter gleaming in her dark eyes. "I suppose you consider that tantamount to winning. Was Lord Bearwarden much disappointed, and did he swear horribly?"

"Bearwarden never swears," replied Dick. "He only told the starter he wondered he could get them off at all; for it must have put him out sadly to see all the boys laughing at him. I've no doubt one or two were fined in the very next race, for the official didn't seem to like it."

Maud pondered. "Is Lord Bearwarden very good-tempered?" said she.

"Well, he never breaks out," answered Dick. "But why do you want to know?"

"Because you and he are such friends," said this artful young lady. "Because I can't make him out—because I don't care whether he is or not! And now, Mr. Stanmore, though you've not been to see your mamma yet, you've behaved like a good boy, considering; so I've got a little treat in store for you. Will you drive me out in your phaeton?"

"Will a duck swim?" exclaimed Dick, delighted beyond measure, with but the one drawback to supreme happiness, of a wish that his off-horse had been more than twice in harness.

"Now before I go to put my bonnet on," continued Miss Bruce, threatening him with her finger like a child, "you must promise to do exactly what you're told—to drive very slow and very carefully, and to set me down the instant I'm tired of you, because Aunt Agatha won't hear of our going for more than half an hour or so, and it will take some diplomacy to arrange even that."

Then she tripped upstairs, leaving the door open, so that Dick, looking at himself in the glass, wondering, honest fellow, what she could see in him to like, and thinking what a lucky dog he was, overheard the following conversation at the threshold of his stepmother's chamber on the floor above.

A light tap—a smothered "Who's there?" and the silvery tones of the voice he loved—

"Aunt Agatha—may Mr. Stanmore drive me to Rose and Brilliant's in his phaeton?"

Something that sounded very like "Certainly not."

"But please, Aunt Agatha," pleaded the

voice, "I've got a headache, and an open carriage will do me so much good, and you can call for me afterwards, whenever you like, to do our shopping. I shan't be five minutes putting my bonnet on, and the wind's changed, and it's such a beautiful day!"

Here a door opened, whispers were exchanged, it closed with a bang, a bell rang, an organ in the street struck up "The Marsellaise," and ere it had played eight bars, Maud was on the stairs again, looking, to Dick's admiring eyes, like an angel in a bonnet coming straight down from heaven.

In after-days he often thought of that happy drive—of the pale, beautiful face, in its transparent little bonnet, turned confidingly upwards to his own, of the winning ways, the playfully imperious gestures, the sweet caressing voice—of the hope thrilling to his very heart that perhaps for him might be reserved the blissful lot of thus journeying with her by his side through life.

As they passed into the Park at Albert Gate,

two of his young companions nodded and took off their hats, elbowing each other, as who should say, "I suppose that's a case!" How proud Dick felt, and how happy! The quarter of a mile that brought him to Apsley House seemed a direct road to Paradise; the man who is always watering the rhododendrons shone like a glorified being, and the soft west wind fanned his temples like an air from heaven. How pleasant she was, how quaint, how satirical, how amusing! Not the least frightened when that off-horse shied in Piccadilly—not the least impatient (neither, be sure, was he) when a block of carriages kept them stationary for ten minutes in the narrow gorge of Bond Street. Long before they stopped at Rose and Brilliant's it was all over with Dick.

"You're not to get out," said Maud, while they drew up to the door of that fashionable jeweller. "Yes you may, just to keep my dress off the wheel, but you mustn't come in. I said I'd a treat for you; now tell me without prevarication—will you have sleeve-links with

a cipher or a monogram? Speak up—in one word—quick!"

Sleeve-links! and from *her!* A present to be valued and cherished more than life itself. He could hardly believe his senses. Far too bewildered to solve the knotty point of cipher *versus* monogram, he muttered some incoherent syllables, and only began to recover when he had stared blankly for a good five minutes at the off-horse's ears, from the driving-seat of his phaeton.

It took a long time apparently to pick out those sleeve-links. Perhaps the choicest assortment of such articles remained in the back shop, for thither Miss Bruce retired; and it is possible she may have appealed to the proprietor's taste in her selection, since she was closeted with that gentleman in earnest conference for three-quarters of an hour. Dick had almost got tired of waiting, when she emerged at last to thank him for her drive, and to present him, as she affirmed, with the results of her protracted shopping.

"There is a design on them already," said she, slipping a little box of card into his hand with her pleasantest smile, "so I could not have your initials engraved, but I dare say you won't lose them all the same."

Dick rather thought *not*, hiding the welcome keepsake away in his waistcoat pocket, as near his heart as the construction of that garment would permit; but his day's happiness was over now, for Mrs. Stanmore had arrived in her brougham to take his companion away for the rest of the afternoon.

That night, before he went to bed, I think he was fool enough to kiss the insensible sleeve-links more than once. They were indeed choice little articles of workmanship, bearing on their surface two quaint and fanciful designs, representing a brace of Cupids in difficulty, the one singed by his own torch, the other crying over a broken bow.

At the same hour Maud was enclosing an order for a large sum of money in a letter which seemed to cost her much study and

vexation. Even Miss Bruce found some difficulty in explaining to a lover that she valued truth, honour, and fidelity at so many hundred pounds, while she begged to forward him a cheque for the amount in lieu of the goods marked "damaged and returned."

CHAPTER X.

THE FAIRY QUEEN.

I HAVE said that Simon Perkins was a painter to the tips of his fingers. Just as a carpenter cannot help looking at a piece of wood with a professional glance it is impossible to mistake—a glance that seems to embrace at once its length, depth, thickness, toughness, and general capabilities, so a painter views every object in nature, animate or inanimate, as a subject for imitation and study of his art. The heavens are not too high, the sea too deep, nor the desert too wide to afford him a lesson; and the human countenance, with its endless variety of feature and expression, is a book he

never wearies of learning by heart. When his professional interest in beauty is enhanced by warmer feelings, it may be imagined that vanity could require no fuller tribute of admiration than the worship of one whose special gift it is to decide on the symmetry of outward form.

As a painter, Simon Perkins approved of Nina Algernon—as a man he loved her. Lest his position should not prove sufficiently fatal, she had become of late practically identified with his art, almost as completely as she was mixed up with his every-day life. For many months, perhaps even for years, the germ of a great work had taken root in his imagination. Slowly, almost painfully, that germ developed itself, passing through several stages, sketch upon sketch, till it came to maturity at last in the composition of a large picture on which he was now employed.

The subject afforded ample scope for liberty of fancy in form and grouping—for the indulgence of a gorgeous taste in colouring and

costume. It represented Thomas the Rhymer in Fairyland, at the moment when its glamour is falling from his eyes, when its magic lustre is dying out on all that glittering pageantry and the elfin is fading to a gnome. The handsome wizard turns from a crowd of phantom shapes, half-lovely, half-grotesque —for their change is even now in progress —to look wistfully and appealingly on the queen.

There is a pained expression in his comely features, of hurt affection, and trust betrayed, yet not without a ray of pride and triumph, that, come what might to the others, she is still unchanged. Around him the fairies are shedding their glory as trees in autumn shed their leaves. Here a sweet laughing face surmounts the hideous body of an imp, there the bright scales of an unearthly armour shrivel to rottenness and dust. The dazzling robes are turning blank and colourless, the emerald rays waning to a pale, sad light, the flashing diadem is dulled and dim. Yet on the fairy queen

there lowers no shadow of change, there threaten no symptoms of decay.

Bathed in the halo of a true though hapless love, she is still the same as when he first saw her all those seven long years ago, glistening in immortal charms, and knelt to her for the queen of heaven, where she rode—"under the linden tree."

It is obvious that on her countenance, besides the stamp of exceeding beauty, there must appear sorrow, self-reproach, fortitude, majesty, and undying tenderness. All these the painter thought he read in Nina Algernon's girlish face.

So she sat to him dutifully enough for a model of his fairy queen, and if she wearied at times, as I think she must, comforted herself with the remembrance that in this way she helped the family who gave her bread.

For the convenience of sitters, Simon Perkins had his painting-room in Berners Street: thither it was his custom to resort in the morning, by penny steamer or threepenny

omnibus, and there he spent many happy hours working hard with palette and brush. Not the least golden seemed those in which Nina accompanied him to sit patiently while he studied, and drew her, line by line, feature by feature. The expeditions to and fro were delightful, the labour was pleasure, the day was gone far too soon.

A morning could not but be fine, when, emerging from an omnibus at Albert Gate, Simon walked by the side of his model through Hyde Park on their way to Berners Street; but about this period one morning seemed even finer than common, because that Nina, taking his arm as they crossed Rotten Row, thought fit to confide to him an interview of the day before with Aunt Jemima, in which she extorted from that dear old lady with some difficulty the fact of her own friendless position in the world.

"And I don't mind it a bit," continued the girl, catching her voice like a child, as was her habit when excited, "for I'm sure you're all so

kind to me that I'd much rather not have any other friends. And I don't want to be independent, and I'll never leave you, so long as you'll keep me. And oh! Simon, isn't it good of your aunts, and you too, to have taken care of me ever since I was quite a little thing? For I'm no relation, you know—and how can I ever do enough for you? I can't. It's impossible. And you don't want me to, if I could!"

Notwithstanding the playful manner which was part of Nina's self, there were tears of real feeling in her eyes, and I doubt if Simon's were quite dry while he answered—

"You belong to us just as much as if you *were* a relation, Nina. My aunts have said so ever since I can remember, and as for me, why you used to ride on my foot when you were in short frocks! What a little romp it was! Always troublesome, and always will be—and that's why we're so fond of you." He spoke lightly, but his voice shook nevertheless.

"So you ought to be," she answered. "For you know how much I love you all."

"What, even stern Aunt Jemima?" said this blundering young man, clumsily beating about the bush, and thus scaring the bird quite as much as if he had thrust his hand boldly into the nest.

"Aunt Jemima best of all," replied Nina, saucily, "because she's the eldest, and tries to keep me in order, but she can't."

"And which of us next best, Nina?" continued he, turning away with extraordinary interest in a mowing machine.

"Aunt Susannah, of course." This very demurely, while tightening her pretty lips to keep back a laugh.

"Then I come last," he observed, gently; but there was something in the tone that made her glance sharply in his face.

She pressed his arm. "You dear old simple Simon," said she, kindly. "Surely you must know me by this time. I love you very dearly, just as if you were my brother. Brother, indeed! I don't think if I'd a father I could be much fonder of him than I am of you."

What a bright morning it had been five minutes ago, and now the sky seemed clouded all at once. Simon even thought the statue of Achilles looked more grim and ghostly than usual, lowering there in his naked bronze.

She had wounded him very deeply, that pretty unconscious archer. These random shafts for which no interposing shield makes ready are sure to find the joints in our harness. A tough hard nature such as constitutes the true fighter only presses more doggedly to the front, but gentler spirits are fain to turn aside out of the battle, and go home to die. There came a dimness before Simon's eyes, and a ringing in his ears. He scarcely heard his companion, while she asked—

"Who are those men bowing? Do you know them? They must take me for somebody else."

"Those men bowing" were two no less important characters than Lord Bearwarden and Tom Ryfe, the latter in the act of selling

the former a horse. Such transactions, for some mysterious reason, always take place in the morning, and whatever arguments may be adduced against a too enthusiastic worship of the noble animal, at least it promotes early rising.

Tom Ryfe was one of those men rarely seen in the saddle or on the box, but who, nevertheless, always seem to have a horse to dispose of, whatever be the kind required. Hack, hunter, pony, phaeton-horse, he was either possessor of the very animal you wanted, or could suit you with it at twenty-four hours' notice; yet if you met him by accident riding in the Park, he was sure to tell you he had been mounted by a friend; if you saw him driving a team—and few could handle four horses in a crowded thoroughfare with more neatness and precision — you might safely wager it was from the box of another man's coach.

He was supposed to be a very fine rider over a country, and there were vague traditions of

his having gone exceedingly well through great runs on special occasions; but these exploits had obviously lost nothing of their interest in the process of narration, and were indeed enhanced by that obscurity which increases the magnitude of most things, in the moral as in the material world.

Mr. Ryfe knew all the sporting men about London, but not their wives. He was at home on the Downs and the Heath, in the pavilion at Lord's, and behind the traps of the Red House. He dined pretty frequently at the barracks of the household troops, welcome to the genial spirits of his entertainers, chiefly for those qualities with which they themselves credited him; and he called Bearwarden "My lord," wherefore that nobleman thought him a snob, and would perhaps have considered him a still greater if he had *not*.

The horse in question showed good points and fine action. Mr. Ryfe walked, trotted, cantered, and finally reined him up at the rails on which Lord Bearwarden was leaning.

"Rather a flat-catcher, Tom," said that nobleman, between the whiffs of a cigar. "Too much action for a hunter, and too little body. He wouldn't carry my weight if the ground was deep, though he's not a bad goer, I'll admit."

"Exactly what I said at first, my lord," answered Tom, slipping the reins through his fingers, and letting the horse reach over the iron bar against his chest, to crop the tufts of grass beneath, an attitude in which his fine shoulders and liberty of frame showed to great advantage. "I never thought he was a fourteen-stone horse, and I never told you so."

"And I never told *you* I rode fourteen stone, did I?" replied Lord Bearwarden, who was a little touchy on that score. "Thirteen five at the outside, and not so much as that after deer-stalking in Scotland. He's clean thoroughbred, isn't he?"

The purchaser was biting, and Tom understood his business as if he had been brought up to it.

"Clean," he answered, passing his leg over the horse's neck, and sliding to the ground, thus leaving his saddle empty for the other. "But he's thrown away on a heavy man. His place is carrying thirteen stone over high Leicestershire. Nothing could touch him there amongst the hills. Jumping's a vulgar accomplishment. Plenty of them can jump if one dare ride them, but he's really an extraordinary fencer. Such a mouth, too, and such a *gentleman!* Why he's the pleasantest hack in London. You like a nice hack, my lord. Get up and feel him. It's like riding a bird."

So Lord Bearwarden jumped on, and altered the stirrups, and crammed his hat down, ere he rode the horse to and fro, trying him in all his paces, and probably falling in love with him forthwith, for he returned with a brightened eye and higher colour to Tom Ryfe on the footway.

It was at this juncture both gentlemen started and took their hats off to the lady who

walked some fifty paces off, arm-in-arm with Simon Perkins, the painter.

Their salute was not returned. The lady, indeed, to whom it was addressed seemed to hurry on all the faster with her companion. It was remarkable, and both remarked it, that neither made any observation on this lack of courtesy, but finished their bargain without apparently half so much interest in sale or purchase as they felt five minutes ago.

"You'll dine with us, Tom, on the 11th?" said Bearwarden, when they parted opposite Knightsbridge Barracks, but he was obviously thinking of something else.

"On the 11th," repeated Tom—"delighted, my lord—at eight o'clock, I suppose," and turned his horse's head soberly towards Piccadilly, proceeding at a walk, as one who revolved certain reflections, not of the most agreeable, in his mind. A dinner at the barracks was usually rather an event with Mr. Ryfe, but on the present occasion he forgot all about it before he had gone a hundred yards.

Lord Bearwarden, rejecting the temptation of luncheon in the mess-room, ran upstairs to his own quarters to think—of course he smoked at the same time.

This nobleman was one of the many of his kind who, to their credit be it said, are not spoiled by sailing down the stream with the wind in their favour. He had been "a good fellow" at Eton, he remained "a good fellow" in the regiment. With general society he was not perhaps quite so popular. People said he "required knowing;" and for those who didn't choose to take the trouble of knowing him he was a little reserved; with men, even a little rough. His manner was of the world, worldly, and gave the idea of complete heartlessness and *savoir faire;* yet under this seemingly impervious covering lurked a womanly romance of temperament, a womanly tenderness of heart, than which nothing would have made him so angry as to be accused of possessing. His habits were manly and simple, his chief ambition was to distinguish himself as a soldier,

and so far as he could find opportunity he had seen service with credit on the staff. A keen sportsman, he could ride and shoot as well as his neighbours, and this is saying no little amongst the young officers of the Household Brigade.

Anything but a "ladies' man," there was yet something about Bearwarden, irrespective of his income and his coronet, that seemed to interest women of all temperaments and characters. They would turn away from far handsomer, better dressed, and more amusing people to attract his notice when he entered a room, and the more enterprising would even make fierce love to him on further acquaintance, particularly after they discovered what up-hill work it was. Do they appreciate a difficulty the greater trouble it requires to surmount, or do they enjoy a scrape the more, that they have to squeeze themselves into it by main force? I wonder if the sea-nymphs love their Tritons because those zoophytes must necessarily be so cold! It is doubtless

against the hard impenetrable rock that the sea-waves dash themselves again and again. Bearwarden responded but faintly to the boldest advances. There must be a reason for it, said the fair assailants. Curiosity grew into interest, and, flavoured with a dash of pique, formed one of those messes with which, in stimulating their vanity, women fancy they satisfy their hunger of the heart.

Bearwarden was a man with a history; of this they were quite sure, and herein they were less mistaken than people generally find themselves who jump to conclusions. Yes, Bearwarden had a history, and a sad one, so far as the principal actor was concerned. Indeed he dared not think much about it even yet, and drove it—for he was no weak, silly sentimentalist—by sheer force of will out of his mind. Indeed, if it had not wholly changed his *real* self, it had encrusted him with that hardness and roughness of exterior which he turned instinctively to the world. The same thing had happened to him that happens to

most of us at one time or another. Just as the hunting man, sooner or later, is pretty sure to be laid up with a broken collar-bone, so in the career of life must be encountered that inevitable disaster which results in a wounded spirit and a sore heart. The collar-bone, we all know, is a six weeks' job, but injuries of a tenderer nature take far longer to heal. Nevertheless, the cure of these, too, is but a question of time, though, to carry on the metaphor, I think in either case the hapless rider loses some of the zest and dash which distinguished his earlier performances, previous to discomfiture. "Only a woman's hair," wrote Dean Swift on a certain packet hidden away in his desk. And thus a very dark page in Lord Bearwarden's history might have been headed "only a woman's falsehood." Not much to make a fuss about, surely; but he was kind, generous, of a peculiarly trustful disposition, and it punished him very sharply, though he tried hard to bear his sorrow like a man. It was the usual business. He had

attached himself to a lady of somewhat lower social standing than his own, of rather questionable antecedents, and whom the world accepted to a certain extent on sufferance, as it were, and under protest, yet welcomed her cordially enough, nevertheless. His relations abused her, his friends warned him against her; of course he loved her very dearly, all the more that he had to sacrifice many interests for her sake, and so resolved to make her his wife.

For reasons of her own she stipulated that he should leave his regiment, and even in this, though he would rather have lost an arm, he yielded to her wish.

The letter to his colonel in which he requested permission to send in his papers actually lay sealed on the table, when he received a note in a well-known hand that taught him the new lesson he had never expected to learn. The writer besought his forgiveness, deploring her own heartlessness the while, and proceeded to inform him that there was a Somebody else in the field to

whom she was solemnly promised (just as she had been to him), and with whom she was about to unite her Lot—capital L. She never could be happy, of course, but it was her destiny: to fight against it was useless, and she trusted Lord B. would forget her, &c. &c. All this in well-chosen language, and written with an exceedingly good pen.

It was lucky his letter to the colonel had not been sent. In such sorrows as these a soldier learns how his regiment is his real home, how his comrades are the stanchest, the least obtrusive, and the sincerest of friends.

Patting his charger's neck at the very next field-day, Bearwarden told himself there was much to live for still; that it would be unsoldierlike, unmanly, childish, to neglect duty, to wince from pleasure, to turn his back on all the world had to offer, only because a woman followed her nature and changed her mind.

So he bore it very well, and those who knew him best wondered he cared so little: and all the while he never heard a strain of music, nor

felt a ray of sunshine, nor looked on beauty of any kind whatever, without that gnawing cruel pain at his heart. Thus the years passed on, and the women of his family declared that Bearwarden was a confirmed old bachelor.

When he met Miss Bruce at Lady Goldthred's, no doubt he admired her beauty and approved of her manner, but it was neither beauty nor manner, nor could he have explained what it was that caused the pulses within him to stir, as they stirred long ago—that brought back a certain flavour of the old draught he had quaffed so eagerly, to find it so bitter at the dregs. Another meeting with Maud, a dance or two, a whisper on a crowded staircase, and Lord Bearwarden told himself that the deep wound had healed at last; that the grass was growing fresh and fair over the grave of a dead love; that for him too, as for others, there might still be an interest in the chances of the great game.

Surely the blind restored to sight is more grateful, more joyous, more triumphant, than

he who, born in darkness, finds himself overwhelmed and dazzled with the glare of his new gift!

Some men are so strangely constituted that they like a woman all the better for "snubbing" them. Lord Bearwarden had never felt so grave an interest in Miss Bruce as when he entered the barracks under the impression she had cut him dead, without the slightest pretext or excuse.

Not so Tom Ryfe. In that gentleman's mind mingled the several disagreeable sensations of surprise, anger, jealousy, and disgust. Of these he chewed the bitter cud while he rode home, wondering with whom Miss Bruce could thus dare to parade herself in public, maddened at the open rebellion inferred by so ignoring his presence and his love, vowing to revenge himself without delay by tightening the curb and making her feel, to her cost, the hold he possessed over her person and her actions. By the time he reached his uncle's house, he had made up his mind to demand an

explanation, to come to a final understanding, to assert his authority, and to avenge his pride. He turned pale to see Maud's monogram on the envelope of a letter that had arrived during his absence; paler still, when from this letter a thin slip of stamped paper fluttered to the floor —white to the very lips while he read the sharp, decisive, cruel lines that accounted for its presence in the missive, and that bade him relinquish at a word all the hope and happiness of his life. Without unbuttoning his coat, without removing the hat from his head, or the gloves from his hands, he sat fiercely down, and wrote his answer.

"You think to get rid of me, Miss Bruce, as you would get rid of an unsuitable servant, by giving him his wages and bidding him to go about his business. You imagine that the debt between us is such as a sum of money can at once wipe out: that because you have been able to raise this money (and how you did so I think I have a right to ask) our business connection ceases, and the *lover*, inconvenient,

no doubt, from his priority of claim, must go to the wall directly the *lawyer* has been paid his bill. You never were more mistaken in your life. Have you forgotten a certain promise I hold of yours, written in your own hand, signed with your own signature, furnished, as itself attests, of your own free will? and do you think I am a likely man to forego such an advantage? You might have had me for a friend—how dear a friend I cannot bear to tell you now. If you persist in making me an enemy, you have but yourself to blame. I am not given to threaten; and you know that I can generally fulfil what I promise. I give you fair warning then: so surely as you try, in the faintest item, to elude your bargain, so surely will I cross your path, and spoil your game, and show you up before the world. Mine you are, and mine you shall be. If of free will, happily; if not, then to your misery and my own. But, mark me, always *mine!*"

"The wisest clerks are not the wisest men."

It is a bad plan ever to drive a woman into a corner; and with all his knowledge of law, I think Mr. Ryfe could hardly have written a more ill-advised and injudicious letter than the above to Miss Bruce.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE SCALES.

IT was a declaration of war. Of all women in the world—and this is saying a great deal—Maud was perhaps the least disposed to accept anything like usurpation, or assumption of undue authority, especially on the part of one in whose character she had detected an element of weakness. Tom Ryfe, notwithstanding his capabilities, was a fool, like most others, where his feelings were touched, and proved it by the injudicious means he used to attain the end he so desired.

Locked in her own room, she read his letter over and over again, with a bitter curl of her

lip, that denoted hatred, scorn, even contempt. When a man has been unfortunate enough to excite the last of these amiable feelings, he should lose no time in decamping, for the game is wholly and irretrievably lost. Mr. Ryfe would have felt this, could he have seen the gestures of the woman he loved, while she tore his letter into shreds—could he have marked the carriage of her haughty head, the compression of her sweet, resolute lips, the fierce energy of her white, cruel hands. Maud paced the floor for some half-dozen turns, opened the window, arranged the bottles on her toilet-table, the flowers on her chimneypiece, even took a good long look at herself in the glass, and sat down to think.

For weeks she had been revolving in her mind the necessity of breaking with Tom Ryfe, the policy of securing position and freedom by an early marriage. That odious letter decided her; and now it only remained to make her choice. There are women—and these, though sometimes the most fascinating, by no means

the most trustworthy of their sex—who possess over mankind a mesmeric influence, almost akin to witchcraft. Without themselves feeling deeply, perhaps for the very reason that they do *not*, they are capable of exercising a magic sway over those with whom they come in contact; and while they attract more admirers than they know what to do with, are seldom very fortunate in their selection, or happy in their eventual lot. Miss Bruce was one of these witches, far more mischievous than the old conventional hags we used to burn under the sapient government of our first Stuart, and she knew a deal better than any old woman who ever mounted a broomstick the credulity of her victims, the dangerous power of her spells. These she had lately been using freely. It was time to turn their exercise to good account.

"Mr. Stanmore *would*, in a moment," thought Maud, "if I only gave him the slightest hint. And I like him. Yes. I like him very much indeed. Poor Dick! What

a fool one can make a man look, to be sure, when he's in love, as people call it! Aunt Agatha wouldn't much fancy it, I suppose; not that I should care two pins about that. And Dick's very easy to manage—too easy, I think. He seems as if I couldn't make him angry. I made him *sorry*, though, the other day, poor fellow! but that's not half such fun. Now Lord Bearwarden *has* got a temper, I'm sure. I wonder, if we were to quarrel, which would give in first. I don't think I should. I declare it would be rather nice to try. He's good-looking—that's to say, good-looking for a *man*. It's an ugly animal at best. And they tell me the Den is such a pretty place in the autumn! And twenty thousand a year! I don't care so much about the money part of it. Of course one must have money; but Selina St. Croix assured me that they called him The Impenetrable; and there wasn't a girl in London he ever danced with twice. *Wasn't* there? He danced with me three times in two hours; but I didn't say so. I suppose people

would open their eyes. I've a great mind—a *very* great mind. But then, there's Dick. He'd be horribly bored, poor fellow! And the worst of it is, he wouldn't *say* anything; but I know exactly how he'd look, and I should feel I was a *beast!* What a bother it all is! But something must be done. I can't go on with this sort of life; I can't stand Aunt Agatha much longer. There she goes, calling on the stairs again! Why can't she send my maid up, if she wants me?"

But Miss Bruce ran down willingly enough when her aunt informed her, from the first floor, that she must make haste, and Dick was in the large drawing-room.

She found mother and son, as they called themselves, buried in a litter of cards, envelopes, papers of every description referring to "Peerage," "Court Guide," visiting-list—all such aids to memory—the charts, as it were, of that voyage which begins in the middle of April and ends with the last week in July. As usual on great undertakings, from the opening

of a campaign to the issuing of invitations for a ball, too much had been left to the last moment; there was a great deal to do, and little time to do it.

"We can't get on without *you*, Miss Bruce," said Dick, with rising colour and averted eyes, that denoted how much less efficient an auxiliary he would prove since she had come into the room. "My mother has mislaid the old visiting-list, and the new one only goes down to T: so that the U's, and the V's, and W's will be all left out. Think how we shall be hated in London next week! To be sure it's what my mother calls 'small and early,' like young potatoes, and I hear there are three hundred cards sent out already."

"You'll only hinder us, Mr. Stanmore," said Maud. "Hadn't you better go away again?" but observing Dick's face fall, the smiling eyes added, plainly as words could speak, "if you *can!*" She looked pale though, and unhappy, he thought. Of course he felt fonder of her than ever.

"Hinder you!" he repeated. "Why, I'm the mainstay of the whole performance. Don't I bring you eight-and-twenty dancing men? all at once if you wish it, in a body, like soldiers."

"Nonsense, my dear," interrupted Aunt Agatha. "The staircase will be crowded enough as it is."

Maud laughed.

"But are they *real* dancing men?" she asked, "not 'dummies,' 'duffers,'—what do you call them? people who only stand against the wall and look idiotic. They're no use unless they work regularly through; as if it was a match or a boat-race. I don't call it dancing to hover about, and be always wanting to go down to tea or supper, and to haunt one and look cross if one behaves with common propriety—like some people I know."

Dick accepted the imputation.

"*I'm* not a dancing man," said he, "though my eight-and-twenty friends are. I cannot see the pleasure of being hustled about in a hot room with a girl I never saw before in my life,

and never want to see again,—who is looking beyond me all the time, watching the door for another fellow who never comes."

"Then why on earth do you go?" asked Miss Bruce, simply.

"*You* know why," he answered in a low voice, without raising his eyes to her face.

"Oh! I dare say," replied Maud; but though it was couched in a tone of banter, the smile that accompanied this pertinent remark seemed to afford Dick unbounded satisfaction.

Mrs. Stanmore looked up from her writing-table.

"I can't get on while you two are jabbering in that corner." (She had not heard a word either of them said.) "I'll take my visiting-list upstairs. You can put these cards in envelopes and direct them. It will help me a little, but you're neither of you much use."

She gathered her materials together and was leaving the room. Dick's heart began beating to some purpose; but his stepmother stopped at the door and addressed her niece.

"By-the-by, Maud, I'd almost forgotten. I'm going to Rose and Brilliant's. Fetch me your diamonds, and I'll take them to be cleaned. I can see the people myself, you know, and make sure of your having them back in time for the ball."

The girl turned white. Dick saw it, though his mother did not. He observed, too, that she gasped as if she was trying to form words which would not come.

"I am not going to wear them." She got it out at last with difficulty.

"Not wear them! nonsense!" was the reply. "Bring them down, my dear, at any rate, and let me look them over. If you don't want it, you might lend me the collar—it would go very well with my mauve satin."

Maud's eyes turned here and there as if to look for help, and it was Dick's nature to throw himself in the gap.

"I'll take them, mother," said he. "My phaeton's at the door now. You've plenty to do, and it will save you a long drive. Besides,

I can blow the people up more effectually than a lady."

"I'm not so sure of that," answered Mrs. Stanmore. "However, it's a sensible plan enough. Maud can fetch them down for you, and you may come back to dinner if you're disengaged."

So speaking, Mrs. Stanmore sailed off, leaving the young people alone.

Maud thanked him with such a look as would have repaid Dick for a far longer expedition than from Belgravia to Bond Street.

"What should I do without you, Mr. Stanmore?" she said. "You always come to the rescue just when I want you most."

He coloured with delight.

"I like doing things for *you*," said he, simply; "but I don't know that taking a parcel a mile and a-half is such a favour after all. If you'll bring it, I'll start directly you give the word."

Miss Bruce had been very pale hitherto, now a burning blush swept over her face to the temples.

"I—I can't bring you my diamonds," said she, "for the first of those thirty reasons that prevented Napoleon's general from bringing up his guns—I haven't got them: they're at Rose and Brilliant's already."

"Maud!" he exclaimed, unconsciously using her Christian name—a liberty with which she seemed in nowise offended.

"You may well say 'Maud!'" she murmured in a soft, low voice. "If you knew all, you'd never call me Maud. I don't believe you'd ever speak to me again."

"Then I'd rather *not* know all," he replied. "Though it would have to be something very bad indeed if it could make me think ill of *you!* Don't tell me anything, Miss Bruce, except that you would like your diamonds back again."

"They *must* be got back!" she exclaimed. "I *must* have them back by fair means or foul. I can't face Aunt Agatha, now that she knows, and can't appear at her ball without them. Oh! Mr. Stanmore, what shall I do? Do you

think Rose and Brilliant's would *lend* them to me only for one night?"

Dick began to suspect something, began to surmise that this young lady had been "raising the wind," as he called it, and to wonder for what mysterious purpose she could want so large a sum as had necessitated the sacrifice of her most valuable jewels; but she seemed in such distress that he felt this was no time for explanation.

"Do!" he repeated cheerfully, and walking to the window that he might not seem to notice her trouble. "Why do as I wish you had done all through—leave everything to *me*. I was going to say, 'trust me,' but I don't want to be trusted. I only want to be made use of."

Her better nature was conquering her fast.

"But indeed I *will* trust you," she murmured. "You deserve to be trusted. You are so kind, so good, so true. You will despise me, I know —very likely hate me, and never come to see me again; but I don't care—I can't help it. Sit down, and I will tell you everything."

He did not blush nor stammer now, his voice was very firm, and he stood up like a man.

"Miss Bruce," said he, "Maud—yes, I'm not afraid to call you Maud—I won't hear another word. I don't want to be told anything. Whatever you have done makes no difference to me. Some day, perhaps, you'll remember how I believed in you. In the mean time tell my mother that the diamonds will be back in time for her ball. How late it is! I must be off like a shot. Those horses will be perfectly wild with waiting. I'm coming to dinner. Good-bye!"

He hurried away without another look, and Maud, burying her head in the sofa-cushions, burst out crying, as she had not cried since she was a child.

"He's too good for me!—he's too good for me!" she repeated, between the sobs she tried hard to keep back. "How wicked and vile I should be to throw him over! He's to good for me!—too good for me by far!"

CHAPTER XII.

"A CRUEL PARTING."

THE phaeton-horses went off like wildfire, Dick driving as if he was drunk. Omnibus-cads looked after him with undisguised admiration, and hansom cabmen, catching the enthusiasm of pace, found themselves actually wishing they were gentlemen's servants, to have their beer found, and sit behind such steppers as those!

The white foam stood on flank and shoulder when the pair were pulled up at Rose and Brilliant's door.

Dick bustled in with so agitated an air that an experienced shopman instantly lifted the

glass from a tray containing the usual assortment of wedding-rings.

"I'm come about some diamonds," panted the customer, casting a wistful glance towards these implements of coercion the while. "A set of diamonds—very valuable—left here by a lady—a young lady—I want them back again."

He looked about him helplessly; nevertheless, the shopman, himself a married man, became at once less commiserating, and more confidential.

"Diamonds!" he repeated. "Let me see—yes, sir—quite so—I think I recollect. Perhaps you'll step in and speak to our principal. Mind your hat, if you please, sir—yes, sir—this way, sir."

So saying, he ushered Mr. Stanmore through glass doors into a neat little room at the back, where sat a bald, smiling personage in sober attire, something between that of a provincial master of hounds and a low-church clergyman, whose cool composure, as it struck Dick at the

time, afforded a ludicrous contrast to his own fuss and agitation.

"*My* name is Rose, sir," said the placid man. "Pray take a seat."

Nobody can "take a seat" under feelings of strong excitement. Dick grasped the proffered chair by the back.

"Mr. Rose," he began, "what I have to say to you goes no farther."

"Oh dear, no!—certainly not—Mr. Stanmore, I believe? I hope I see you well, sir. This is my *private* room, you understand, sir. Whatever affairs we transact here are *in* private. How can I accommodate you, Mr. Stanmore?" Dick looked so eager, the placid man was persuaded he must want money.

"There's a young lady," said Dick, plunging at his subject, "who left her diamonds here last week—quite a young lady—very handsome. Did she give you her name?"

Mr. Rose smiled and shook his head benevolently. "If any jewels of value were left with *us*, you may be sure we satisfied ourselves

of the party's name and address. Perhaps I can help you, Mr. Stanmore. Can you favour me with the date?"

"Yes, I can," answered Dick, "and the name too. It's no use humbugging about it. Miss Bruce was the lady's name. There! Now she wants her jewels back again. She's changed her mind."

Mr. Rose took a ledger off the table, and ran his finger down its columns. "Quite correct, sir," said he, stopping at a particular entry. "You are acquainted with the circumstances, of course."

Dick nodded, esteeming it little breach of confidence to look as if he knew all about it.

"There is no difficulty whatever," continued the bland Mr. Rose. "Happy to oblige Miss Bruce. Happy to oblige *you*. We shall charge a small sum for commission. Nothing more—oh! dear, no! Have them cleaned up? Certainly, sir; and you may depend on their being sent home in time. At your convenience, Mr. Stanmore. No hurry, sir. You

can write me your cheque for the amount. Perhaps I'd better draw out a little memorandum. We shall make a mere nominal charge for cleaning."

Dick glanced over the memorandum, including its nominal charge for cleaning, which, perhaps from ignorance, did not strike him as being extraordinarily low. He was somewhat startled at the sum total, but when this gentleman made up his mind, it was not easy to turn him from an object in view.

The steppers, hardly cool, were hurried straight off to his banker's, to be driven, after their owner's interview with one of the partners, back again to the great emporium of their kind at Tattersall's.

A woman who wants to make a sacrifice parts with her jewels, a man sells his horses. Honour to each, for each offers up what is nearest and dearest to the heart.

Dick Stanmore lived no more within his income than other people. To get back these diamonds he would have to raise a considerable

sum. There was nothing else to be done. The hunters must go: nay, the whole stud, phaeton-horses, hacks, and all. Yet Dick marched into the office to secure stalls for an early date, with a bright eye and a smiling face. He was proving, to *himself*, at least, how well he loved her.

The first person he met in the yard was Lord Bearwarden. That nobleman, though knowing him but slightly, had rather a liking for Stanmore, cemented by a certain good run they once saw in company, when each approved of the other's straightforward riding and unusual forbearance towards hounds.

"There's a nice horse in the boxes," said my lord; "looks very like your sort, Stanmore, and they say he'll go cheap, though he's quite sound."

"Thanks," answered Dick. "But I'm all the other way. Been taking stalls. Going to sell."

"Draft?" asked his lordship, who did not waste words.

"All of them," replied the other. "Even the hacks, saddlery, clothing, in short, the whole plant, and without reserve—going to give it up—at any rate for a time."

"Sorry for that," replied Bearwarden, adding, courteously, "Can I offer you a lift? I'm going your way. Indeed, I'm going to call at your mother's. Shall I find the ladies at home?"

"A little later you will," said honest, unsuspecting Dick, who had not yet learned the lesson that teaches it is not worth while to trust or mistrust any of the sex. "They'll be charmed to give you some tea. I'm off to Croydon to look over my poor screws before they're sold, and break it to my groom."

"That's a right good fellow," thought Lord Bearwarden, "and not a bad connection if I was fool enough to marry the dark girl, after all." So he called out to Dick, who had one foot on the step of his phaeton—

"I say, Stanmore, come and dine with us on the 11th; we've got two or three hunting

fellows, and we can go on together afterwards to your mother's ball."

"All right," said Stanmore, and bowled away in the direction of Croydon at the rate of fourteen miles an hour. If the horses were to be sold, people might just as well be made aware of the class of animal he kept. Though the sacrifice involved was considerable, it would be wise to lessen it by all judicious means in his power.

How great a sacrifice he scarcely felt till he arrived at his country stables.

Dick Stanmore had been fonder of hunting than any other pursuit in the world, ever since he went out for the first time on a Shetland pony, and came home with his nose bleeding, at five years old.

The spin and "whizz" of his reel, the rush of a brown mountain stream with its fringe of silver birch and stunted alder, the white side of a leaping salmon, and the gasp of that noble fish towed deftly into the shallows at last, afforded him a natural and unmixed pleasure.

He loved the heather dearly, the wild hill-side, the keen, pure air, the steady setters, the flap and cackle of the rising grouse, the ringing shot that laid him low, born in the purple, and fated there to die. Nor, when corn-fields were cleared and partridges almost as swift as bullets, and as numerous as locusts, were driven to and fro across the open, was his aim to be foiled by a flight little less rapid than the shot that arrested it. With a rifle in his hand, a general knowledge of the surrounding forest, and a couple of gillies, give him the wind of a royal stag feeding amongst his hinds, and, despite the feminine jealousy and instinctive vigilance of the latter, an hour's stalk would put the lord of the hills at the mercy of Dick Stanmore. In all these sports he was a proficient, from all of them he derived a keen gratification, but fox-hunting was his passion and his delight.

A fine rider, he loved the pursuit so well, and was so interested in hounds, that he gave his horse every opportunity of carrying him in front, and as his natural qualities included a

good eye, and that confidence in the immediate future which we call "nerve," he was seen in difficulties less often than might be expected from his predilection in favour of "the shortest way."

His horses generally appeared to go pleasantly, and to reciprocate their rider's confidence, for he certainly seemed to get more work out of them than his neighbours.

As Mr. Crop, his stud-groom, remarked, in the peculiar style of English affected by that trustworthy but exceedingly impracticable servant—

"Take and put him on a 'arf-bred' 'oss, an' he rides him like a hangel, nussin' of him, and coaxin' of him, and sendin' of him along, *beautiful* for ground, an' uncommon liberal for fences. Take an' put him on a thoro' bred 'un, like our Vampire 'oss, and—Lor!"

One secret perhaps of that success in the hunting-field, which, when well mounted, even Mr. Crop's eloquence was powerless to express but by an interjection, lay in his master's

affection for the animal. Dick Stanmore dearly loved a horse, as some men do love them, totally irrespective of any pleasure or advantage to be derived from their use.

There is a fanciful oriental legend which teaches that when Allah was engaged in the work of creation, he tempered the lightning with the south wind, and thus created the horse. Whimsical as is this idea, it yet suggests the swiftness, the fire, the mettlesome, generous, but plastic temperament of our favourite quadruped—the only one of our dumb servants in whose spirit we can rouse at will the utmost emulation, the keenest desire for the approval of its lord. Even the countenance of this animal denotes most of the qualities we affect to esteem in the human race —courage, docility, good-temper, reflection (for few faces are so thoughtful as that of the horse), gratitude, benevolence, and, above all, trust. Yes, the full brown eye, large, and mild, and loving, expresses neither spite, nor suspicion, nor revenge. It turns on you with

the mute unquestioning confidence of real affection, and you may depend on it under all pressure of circumstance, in the last extremity of danger or death. Will you say as much for the bluest eyes that ever sparkled in mirth, or swam in tears, or shone and deepened under the combined influence of triumph, belladonna, and war-paint?

I once heard a man affirm that for him there was in every horse's face the beauty each of us sees in the one woman he adores. This outrageous position he assumed after a good run, and, indeed, after the dinner which succeeded it. I will not go quite so far as to agree with him, but I will say that in generosity, temper, and fidelity, there is many a woman, and man too, who might well take example from the noble qualities of the horse.

And now Dick Stanmore was about to offer up half a dozen of these valued servants before the idol he had lately begun to worship, for whom, indeed, he esteemed no victim too precious, no sacrifice too dear.

Driving into his stable-yard, he threw the reins to a couple of helpers, and made use of Mr. Crop's arm to assist his descent. That worthy's face shone with delight. Next to his horses he loved his master—chiefly, it is fair to say, as an important ingredient without which there would be no stud.

"I was expectin' of ye, sir," said he, touching an exceedingly straight-brimmed hat. "Glad to see ye lookin' so well."

To do him justice, Mr. Crop did his duty as if he always *was* expecting his master.

"Horses all right?" asked Dick, moving towards the stable-door.

"'Osses *is* 'ealthy, I am thankful to say," replied the groom, gravely, "and lookin', too, pretty nigh as I could wish, now they've done breakin' with their coats. There's Firetail got a queerish look—them Northamptonshire 'osses is mostly unsound ones—and the mare's off-leg's filled; and the Vampire 'oss, he's got a bit of a splent a-comin', but I'll soon frighten that away; an' old Dandybrush, he's awful,

but not wuss nor I counted; and the young un——"

"I'll look 'em over," said Dick, interrupting what threatened to be a long catalogue. "I came down on purpose. The fact is (take those horses out and feed them)—the fact is, Crop, I'm going to sell them all. I'm going to send them up to Tattersall's."

Every groom is more or less a sporting man, and it is the peculiarity of sporting men to betray astonishment at no eventuality, however startling; therefore Mr. Crop, doing violence to his feelings, moved not a muscle of his countenance.

"I'm sorry to part with them, Crop," added Dick, a little put out by the silence of his retainer, and not knowing exactly what to say next. "They've carried me very well—I've seen a deal of fun on them—I don't suppose I shall ever have such good ones—I don't suppose I shall ever hunt much again."

Mr. Crop began to thaw. "They're *good* 'osses," he observed sententiously; "but that's

not to say as there isn't good 'osses elsewheres. In regard of not huntin' there's a many seasons, askin' your pardon, atween you and me, and I should be sorry to think as I wasn't goin' huntin', ay, twenty years from now! When is 'em goin' up, sir?" added he, sinking sentiment and coming to business at once.

"Monday fortnight," answered Dick, entering a loose box, in which stood a remarkably handsome mare, that neighed at him, and rubbed her head against his breast.

"I should ha' liked another ten days," replied Crop, for it was an important part of his system never to accept his master's arrangements without a protest. "I could ha' got 'em to show as they ought to show by then. Is the stalls took?"

Dick nodded. He was looking wistfully at the mare, thinking what a light mouth she had, and how boldly she faced water.

"That leg'll be as clean as my face in a week," observed Mr. Crop, confidently. "She'll fetch a good price, *she* will. Sir Frederic's

after *her*, I know. There's nothing but tares in there, sir, old Dandybrush is in the box on the right."

Dick gave the mare a loving pat, and turned sadly into the residence of old Dandybrush.

That experienced animal greeted him with laid-back ears and a grin, as though to say, "Here you are again! But I like you best in your red coat."

They had seen many a good gallop together, and rolled over each other with the utmost good-humour, in every description of soil. To look at the old horse, even in his summer guise, was to recall the happiest moments of a sufficiently happy life.

"I'd meant to guv it *him* pretty sharp," said Crop; "but I'll let him alone now. He'd 'a carried you, maybe, another season or two, with a good strong dressin'; but them legs isn't what they *was*. Last time as I rode of him second horse, I found him different—gettin' inquisitive at his places—and when they gets inquisitive they soon begins to get slow.

You'll look at the Vampire 'oss, sir, before you go back to town?"

Now "the Vampire 'oss," as he called him, was an especial favourite with Mr. Crop. Dick Stanmore had bought him out of training at Newmarket by his groom's advice, and the highbred animal, being ridden by an exceedingly good horseman, had turned out a far better hunter than common—not invariably the case with horses that begin life on the Heath. Crop took great pride in this purchase, confidently asserting, and doubtless believing, that England could not produce its equal.

He threw the box-door open with the air of a man who is going to exhibit a picture of his own painting.

"It's a pity to let him go," said the groom, with a sigh. "Where'll you get another as can touch him when the ground's deep, like it was last March? I've had a many to look after, first and last; but such a kind 'oss to do for in the stable I never see. Why, if you was to give that 'oss ten feeds of corn a day he'd take

an' eat 'em all out clean—wouldn't leave a hoat! And legs! Them's not legs! them's slips of gutta-percher an' steel! To be sure he'll fetch a hawful price at the 'ammer—four 'underd, five 'underd, I shouldn't wonder—why he's worth all the money to look at. Blessed if you mightn't ride a good 'ack to death only tryin' to find such another!"

Nevertheless, the Vampire horse was condemned to go up with the rest. Notwithstanding the truth of the groom's protestations, its money value was exactly the quality that decided the animal's fate.

Driving back to London, Dick's heart bounded to think that in an hour's time he should meet Miss Bruce again at dinner. How delightful to be doing all this for her sake, yet to keep the precious secret safe locked in his own breast, until the moment should come when it would be judicious to divulge it, making, at the same time, another confession, of which he hoped the result might be happiness for life.

"I'd do more than that for her," muttered this enthusiastic young gentleman, while he trotted over Vauxhall Bridge. "I liked my poor horses better than anything; and that's just the reason I like to part with them for her sake. My darling, I'd give you the heart out of my breast, even if I thought you'd tread it under foot and send it back again!"

Had such an anatomical absurdity been reconcileable with the structure of the human frame, it is possible Miss Bruce might have treated this important organ in the contumelious manner suggested.

CHAPTER XIII.

SIXES AND SEVENS.

IN the mean time, while Dick Stanmore is hugging himself in the warm atmosphere of hope, while Lord Bearwarden hovers on the brink of a stream in which he narrowly escaped drowning long ago, while Tom Ryfe is plunged in depths of anxiety, jealousy, and humiliation that scorch like liquid fire, Miss Bruce's dark eyes, and winning, wilful ways, have kindled the torch of mistrust and discord between two people of whom she has rarely seen the one and never heard of the other.

Mr. Bargrave's chambers in Gray's Inn were at no time more remarkable for cleanliness

than other like apartments in the same locality; but the dust lies inch-thick now in all places where dust *can* lie, because that Dorothea, more moping and tearful than ever, has not the heart to clean up, no nor even to wash her own hands and face in the afternoon, as heretofore.

She loves her "Jim," of course, all the more passionately that he makes her perfectly miserable, neglecting her for days together, and when they do meet, treating her with an indifference far more lacerating than any amount of cruelty or open scorn.

Not that he is always good-humoured. On the contrary, "Gentleman Jim," as they call him, has lost much of the rollicking, devil-may-care recklessness that earned his nickname, and is often morose now—sometimes even fierce and savage to brutality.

The poor woman has had a quarrel with him, not two hours ago, originating, it is but fair to state, in her own extremely irritating conduct regarding beer, Jim being anxious to treat his

ladye-love with that fluid for the purpose, as he said, of "drowning unkindness," and possibly with the further view of quenching an inconvenient curiosity she has lately indulged about his movements. No man likes to be watched; and the more reason the woman he is betraying has to doubt him, the less patience he shows for her anxiety, the less he tolerates her inquiries, her jealousy, or her reproaches.

Now Dorothea's suspicions, sharpened by affection, have of late grown extremely wearisome, and Jim has been heard to threaten, more than once, that "if so be as she doesn't mend her manners, and live conformable, he'll take an' hook it, he will, blessed if he won't!" —a dark saying which sinks deeply and painfully into the forlorn one's heart. When, therefore, instead of drinking her share, as usual, of a foaming quart measure containing beer, dashed with something stronger, this poor thing set it down untasted, and forthwith began to cry, the cracksman's anger knew no bounds.

"Drop it!" he exclaimed, brutally. "You'd best, I tell ye! D'ye think I want my blessed drink watered with your blessed nonsense? What's come to ye, ye contrairy devil? I thought I'd larned ye better. I'll see if I can't larn ye still. Would ye now!"

It was almost a blow,—such a push as is the next thing to actual violence, and it sent her staggering from the sloppy bar at which their altercation took place against a bench by the wall, where she sat down pale and gasping, to the indignation of a slatternly woman nursing her child, and the concern of an honest coal-heaver, who had a virago of a wife at home.

"Easy, mate!" expostulated that worthy, putting his broad frame between the happy pair. "Hold on a bit, an' give her a drop when she comes to. She'd a' throwed her arms about your neck a while ago, an' now she'd as soon knife ye as look at ye."

Wild-eyed and pale, Dorothea glared round, as Clytemnestra may have glared when her hand rested on the fatal axe; but this Holborn

Agamemnon did not seem destined to fall by a woman's blow, inasmuch as the tide was effectually turned by another woman's interference.

The slatternly lady, shouldering her child, as a soldier does his firelock, thrust herself eagerly forward.

"Knife him!" she exclaimed, with a most unfeminine execration. "I'd knife him, precious soon, if it was me, the blessed willen! To take an' use a woman like that there—a nasty, cowardly, sneakin', ugly, tallow-faced beast!"

Had it not been for the imputation on his beauty, Dorothea might perhaps have blazed out in open rebellion, or remained passive in silent sulks; but to hear *her* Jim, the flash man of a dozen gin-shops, the beloved of a score of rivals, called "ugly," was more than flesh and blood could endure. She turned fiercely on her auxiliary and gave battle at once.

"And who arst *you* to interfere, mem, if I

may wenture to make the inquiry?" said she, with that polite but spasmodic intonation that denotes the approaching row. "Keep yerself *to* yerself, if you please, mem. And I'll thank ye not to go for to come between me and my young man, not till you've got a young man of your own, mem, and if you'd like to walk out, there's the door, mem, and don't you try for to give *me* none o' your sauce, for I'm not a-goin' to put up with it."

The slatternly woman ran her guns out and returned the broadside with promptitude.

"Door, indeed! you poor whey-faced drab, you dare to say the word door to *me*, a respectable woman, as Mister Tripes here knows me well, and have a score against me behind that there wery door as you disgraces, and as it's *you* as ought to be t'other side, you ought, for it's out of the streets as *you* come, well I knows, an' say another word, and I'll take that there bonnet off of your head, and chuck it into them streets and *you* arter it. Oh dear! oh dear! that ever I should be spoke to like this

here, and my master out o' work a month come Toosday, and this here gentleman standing by; but I'll set my mark on ye, if I get six months for it—I will!"

Thus speaking, or rather screaming, and brandishing her baby, as the gonfalonier waves his gonfalon, the slatternly woman, swelling into a fury for the nonce, made a dive at Dorothea, which, but for the interposition of "this here gentleman," as she called the coalheaver, might have produced considerable mischief. That good man, however, took a deal of "weathering," as sailors say, and ere either of the combatants could get round his bulky person, the presence of a policeman at the door warned them that ordeal by battle had better be deferred till a more fitting opportunity. They burst into tears therefore, simultaneously, and the dispute ended, as such disputes often do, in a general reconciliation, cemented by the consumption of much excise-able fluid, some of it at the expense of the philanthropic coalheaver, whose simple faith

involved a persuasion that the closest connection must always be preserved between good-fellowship and beer.

After these potations, it is not surprising that the slatternly woman should have found herself, baby and all, under the care of the civil power at a police-station, or that Gentleman Jim and his ladye-love should have adjourned to sober themselves in the steaming gallery of a play-house.

Behold them, then, wedged into a front seat, Dorothea's bonnet hanging over the rail, Jim's gaudy handkerchief bulging with oranges, both spectators too absorbed in the action of the piece to realize its improbabilities, and the woman thoroughly identifying herself with the character and fortunes of its heroine.

The theatre is small, but the audience if not select are enthusiastic; the stage is narrow, but affords room for a deal of strutting and striding about on the part of an overpowering actor in the inevitable belt and boots of the melo-dramatic highwayman. The play represents

certain startling passages in the career of one Claude Duval, formerly a running footman, afterwards—strange anomaly!—a robber on horseback, distinguished for polite manners and bold riding.

This remarkable person has a wife, devoted to him of course. In the English drama all wives are good; in the French all are bad, and people tell you that a play is the reflection of real life. Besides this dutiful spouse, he cherishes an attachment for a young lady of high birth and aristocratic (stage) manners. She returns his tenderness, as it is extremely natural a young person so educated and brought up would return that of a criminal, who has made an impression on her heart by shooting her servants, rifling her trunks, and forcing her to dance a minuet with him on a deserted heath under a harvest moon.

This improbable incident affords a favourite scene, in which Dorothea's whole soul is absorbed, and to which Jim devotes an earnest attention, as of one who weighs the verisimili-

tude of an illustration, that he may accept the purport of the parable it conveys.

Dead servants (in profusion), struggling horses, the coach upset, and the harvest moon, are depicted in the back scene, which represents besides an illimitable heath, and a gibbet in the middle distance: all this under a glare of light, as indeed it might well be, for the moon is quite as large as the hind wheel of the coach.

In the foreground are grouped, the hero himself, a comic servant with a red nose and a fiddle, an open trunk, and a young lady in travelling costume, viz., white satin shoes, paste diamonds, ball-dress, and lace veil. The tips of her fingers rest in the gloved hand of her assailant, whose voice comes deep and mellow through the velvet mask he wears.

"My preservier!" says the lady, a little inconsequentially, while her fingers are lifted to the mask and saluted with such a smack as elicits a "hooray!" from some disrespectful urchin at the back of the pit.

"To presurrve beauty from the jeer of

insult, the grasp of vie-olence is my duty and my prow-fession. To adore it is my ree-ligion —and my fate!" replies the gallant highwayman, contriving with some address to retain his hold of the lady's hand, though encumbered by spurs, a sword, pistols, a mask, and an enormous three-cornered hat.

"And this man is proscribed, hunted, in danger, in disgrace!" exclaims the lady, aside, and therefore loud enough to be heard in the street. Claude Duval starts. The start of such an actor makes Dorothea jump. "Perdition!" he shouts, "ye have reminded me of what were well buried fathom-deep—obliterated —forgotten. Tr'you, lady, 'tis ee-ven so! I have a compact with my followers — the ransom!"

"Shall be paid right willingly," she answers; and forthwith the comic servant with the red nose wakes into spasmodic life, winks repeatedly, and performs a flourish on his "property" fiddle, a little out of tune with the real instrument in the orchestra at his feet.

"What are they going to do?" asked Dorothea, in great anxiety.

"Hold your noise!" answers Jim, and the action of the piece progresses.

It is fortunate, perhaps, that minuets have gone out of fashion; if they involved such a test of endurance as that in which Claude Duval and his fair captive now disport themselves with an amount of bodily exertion it seems real cruelty to encore. His concluding caper shakes the mask from his partner's face, and the young lady falls, with a shriek, into his arms, leaving the audience in that happy state of perplexity, which so enhances the interest of a plot, as to whether her distress originates in excess of sentiment or deficiency of wind.

"It's beautiful!" whispers Dorothea, refreshing herself with an orange. "It 'minds me of the first time you and me ever met at Highbury Barn."

Jim grunts, but his grunt is not that of a contented sleeper, rather of one who is woke from a dream.

After a tableau like the last, it is natural that Claude Duval should find a certain want of excitement in the next scene, where he appears as a respectable householder in the apartments of his lawful spouse. This lady, leaving a cradle in the background, and advancing to the footlights, proceeds to hover round her husband, after the manner of stage wives, with neck protruded and arms spread out, like a woman who is a little afraid of a wasp or earwig, but wants to catch the creature all the same. He sits with his back to her, as nobody ever does sit but a stage husband at home, and punches the floor with his spur. It is strictly natural that she should sing a faint song with a slow movement, on the spot.

It is perhaps yet more natural that this should provoke him exceedingly, so he jumps up, reaches a cupboard in two strides, and pulls out of it his whole paraphernalia, sword, pistols mask, three-cornered hat, everything but his horse. Then the wife, from her knees, informs all whom it may concern, that for the first time

in their happy married life she has learned her husband is a robber, as they both call it, by "prowfession."

Dorothea's sympathies, womanlike, are with the wife. Jim, whose interest is centred in the young lady, finds this part of the performance rather wearisome, and thirsts, to use his own expression, for "a drain."

Events now succeed each other with startling rapidity. Claude Duval is seen at Ranelagh, still in his boots, where he makes fierce love to his young lady, and exchanges snuff-boxes (literally) with a duke. Next, in a thicket, beset by thief-takers, from whom he escapes after prodigies of valour, aided by the comic servant, and thereafter guided by that singular domestic to a place of safety, which turns out to be the young lady's bedroom. Here Jim becomes much excited, fancying himself for the moment a booted hero, rings, laced-coat, Stein-kirk handkerchief, and all. His dress touches that of his companion, but instinctively he moves from her as far as the crowded seat

will permit, while Dorothea, all unconscious, looks lovingly in his face.

"She's a bold thing, and I can't abide her," is that lady's comment on the principal actress. "She ought to think shame of herself she ought, a-cause of his wife at 'ome. But he's a good plucked-un, isn't he, Jim? and, lady or no lady, that goes a long way with a woman!"

Jim turned his head aside. Brutalized, besotted, depraved, there was yet in him a spark of that fire which lights men to their doom, and his eyes filled with tears.

But the thief-takers have Claude Duval by the throat at last; and there is a scene in court, where the young lady perjures herself unhesitatingly, and faints once more in the prisoner's arms. In vain. Claude Duval is sworn to, found guilty, condemned; and the stage is darkened for a grand finale.

Still gay, still gallant, still impenitent, and still booted, though in fetters, the highwayman sits in his prison cell, to be visited by the young lady, who cannot bear to lose her partner, and the

wife, who still clings to her husband. Unlike Macheath, he seems in no way embarrassed by the position, His wife forgives him, at this supreme moment, all the sorrow he has caused her, in consideration of some unexplained past, "gilded," as she expressed it, "by the sunny smiles of southern France," while the young lady, holding on with great tenacity to his hand, weeps frantically on her knees.

A clock strikes. It is the hour of execution. Dorothea begins to sob, and Gentleman Jim clenches his hands. The back of the stage opens, to disclose a street, a crowd, a hangman, and the fatal Tyburn tree. Faint cheers are heard from the wings. The sheriff enters bearing in his hand a reprieve, written apparently on a window-blind. He is attended by the comic servant, through whose mysterious agency a pardon has been granted, and who sticks by his fiddle to the last.

Grand tableau: Claude Duval penitent. His wife in his arms. The young lady conveying in dumb show how platonic has been her

attachment, of which, nevertheless, she seems a little ashamed. The sheriff benignant; the turnkeys amused; the comic servant, obviously in liquor, brandishing his fiddlestick, and the orchestra playing "God save the Queen."

Walking home through the wet streets, under the flashing gas-lights, Dorothea and her companion preserve an ominous silence. Both identify themselves with the fiction they have lately witnessed. The woman, pondering on Mrs. Duval's sufferings and the eventful reward of that good lady's constancy and truth; her companion reflecting, not on the charms of the actress he has lately been applauding, but on another face which haunts him now, as the wilis and water-sprites haunted their doomed votaries, and which must ever be as far out of reach as if it belonged indeed to some such being of another nature; thinking how a man might well risk imprisonment, transportation, hanging, for one kind glance of those bright eyes, one smile of those haughty, scornful lips; and comparing, in bitter impatience, that exotic

beauty with the humble, homely creature at his side.

She looks up in his face. "Jim," says she, timidly, and cowering close to him the while, "if you was took, and shopped, like him in the long boots, I'd go to quod with you, if they'd give me leave—I'd go to death with you, Jim, I would. I'd never forsake you, I wouldn't! I couldn't, dear,—not if it was ever so!"

He shudders and shrinks from her. "It might come sooner than you think for," says he, adding, brutally enough; "now you *could* do me a turn in the witness-box, though I shouldn't wonder but you'd cut out white like the others. Let's call in here, and take a drop o' gin afore they shuts up."

The great picture of Thomas the Rhymer, and his Elfin Mistress, goes on apace. There is, I believe, but one representation in London of that celebrated prophet, and it is in the possession of his lineal descendant. Every feature, every shadow on that portrait has

Simon Perkins studied with exceeding diligence and care, marvelling, it must be confessed, at the taste of the fairy queen. The accessories to his own composition are in rapid progress. Most of the fairies have been put in, and the gradual change from glamour to disillusion, cunningly conveyed by a stream of cold grey morning light entering the magic cavern from realms of upper earth, to deaden the glitter, pale the colouring, and strip, as it were, the tinsel where it strikes. On the Rhymer himself our artist has bestowed an infinity of pains, preserving (no easy task) some resemblance to the original portrait, while he dresses his conception in the manly form and comely features indispensable to the situation.

But it is into the fairy queen herself that Simon loves to throw all the power of his genius, all the resources of his art. To this labour of love, day after day, he returns with unabated zest, altering, improving, painting out, adding, taking away, drinking in the while his model's beauty, as parched and

thirsty gardens of Egypt drink in the overflowing Nile, to return a tenfold harvest of verdure, luxuriance, and wealth.

She has been sitting to him for three consecutive hours. Truth to tell, she is tired to death of it—tired of the room, the palette, the easel, the queen, the rhymer, the little dusky imp in the corner, whose wings are changing into scales and a tail, almost tired of dear Simon Perkins himself; who is working contendedly on (how can he?) as if life contained nothing more than effect and colouring—as if the reality were not better than the representation after all.

"A quarter of an inch more this way," says the pre-occupied artist. "There is a touch wanting in that shadow under the eye—thanks, dear Nina. I shall get it at last," and he falls back a step to look at his work, with his head on one side, as nobody but a painter *can* look, so strangely does the expression of face combine impartial criticism with a satisfaction almost maternal in its intensity.

Before beginning again, his eye rested on his model, and he could not but mark the air of weariness and dejection she betrayed.

"Why, Nina," said he, "you look quite pale and tired. What a brute I am! I go painting on and forget how stupid it must be for you, who mustn't even turn your head to look at my work."

She gave a stretch, and such a yawn! Neither of them very graceful performances, had the lady been less fair and fascinating, but Nina looked exceedingly pretty in their perpetration nevertheless.

"Work," she answered. "Do you call that work? Why you've undone everything you did yesterday, and put about half of it in again If you're diligent, and keep on at this pace, you'll finish triumphantly with a blank canvas, like Penthesilea and her tapestry in my ancient history."

"Penelope," corrected Simon, gently.

"Well, Penelope! It's all the same. I don't suppose any of it's true. Let's have a

peep, Simon. It can't be. Is that really like me?"

The colour had come back to her face, the light to her eye. She was pleased, flattered, half amused to find herself so beautiful. He looked from the picture to the original, and with all his enthusiasm for art awarded the palm to nature.

"It *was* like you a minute ago," said he, in his grave, gentle tones. "Or rather, I ought to say you were like *it*. But you change so, that I'm often in despair of catching you, and, somehow, I always seem to love the last expression best."

There was something in his voice so admiring, so reverential, and yet so tender, that she glanced quickly, with a kind of surprise, in his face; that face, which, to an older woman, who had known suffering and sorrow, might have been an index of the gentle heart, the noble chivalrous character within, which, to this girl, was simply pale and worn, and not at all handsome, but very dear, nevertheless, as

belonging to her kind old Simon, the playmate of her childhood, the brother, and more than brother, of her youth.

Those encounters are sadly unequal, and very poor fun for the muffled fighter, in which one keeps the gloves on, while the other's blows are delivered with the naked fist.

Miss Algernon was at this time perhaps more attached to Simon Perkins than to any other creature in the world; that is to say, she did not happen to like anybody else better. How different from him, to whom she represented the very essence of that spiritual life which, in our several ways, we all try to live, which so few of us know how to attain by postponing its enjoyment for a few short troubled years.

It is probable that, if the painter had thrown down his brush at this juncture, and asked, simply, "Nina, will you be my wife?" she would have answered, "Thank you kindly, yes, I will!" but although his judgment told him he was likely to succeed, his finer in-

stincts warned him that an affirmative would be the sacrifice of her youth, her illusions, her possible future. Such sacrifice it was far more in Simon's nature to make than to accept.

"Will she ever know me thoroughly?" he used to think. "Will the time ever come when I can say to her, 'Nina, I am sure you care for me now, and therefore I am not afraid to tell you how dearly I loved you all through?' Such a time would be well worth waiting for, ay, though it never came for seven years, and seven more to the back of that. Then I should feel her happiness depended on mine. Now I often think the prince in the fairy tale will ride past our Putney villa some summer's day, like Launcelot through the barley sheaves (I'll paint Launcelot when I've time, with the ripe ears reddened in the sun, and the light flashing off his harness) ride by, and take Nina's heart away with him, and what will be left for me then? I could bear it! Yes, I could bear it if I knew she was happy. My darling, my darling! so that you walk on in

joy and triumph, it matters little what becomes of me!"

The sentiment was perhaps overstrained. It is not thus that women are won. The fruit that drops into people's mouths is usually over-ripe, and the Sabine maiden would have thought less of her Roman lover, though doubtless she would have taken the initiative rather than miss him altogether, had it been necessary to pounce on him in the vineyard and desire him straightway to carry her home. But the bird of prey must have its natural victim, and such hearts as our poor generous painter possessed are destined for the talons and the beak. Ah! those who value them least win the great prizes in the lottery. Fortune smiles on the careless player—gold goes to the rich—streams run to the river, and if you have more mutton than you know what to do with, be sure that in your folds will be found the poor man's ewe-lamb. Put a ribbon round her neck, and be kind to her as *he* was. It is the least you can do!

"You've taken a deal of pains, Simon," says the sitter, after a long and well-pleased scrutiny. "Tell me, no flattery now, why should I be so difficult to paint?" Why, indeed, you saucy innocent coquette! Perhaps, because, all the while, you are turning the poor artist's head, and driving pins and needles into his heart.

"I *ought* to make a good likeness of you," answers Simon, rather sadly. "I'm sure, Nina, I know your face by heart. But I'm determined to take enormous pains with this picture. It's to be my great work. I want them to admire it at the Academy. I want all London to come and look at it. I want the critics, who know nothing, to say it's well drawn; and the artists, who do know something, to say it's well treated; and the public to declare my fairy queen is the loveliest, and the sweetest, and the dearest face they ever beheld. You see I'm very—very—*ambitious*, Nina!".

"Yes, I suppose all painters are," replies

Miss Algernon, with a little gasp of relief, accompanied by a little chill of something not quite unlike disappointment. "But you ought to be tired of working, and I know I am tired of sitting. Hand me my bonnet, Simon—not upside down—why that's the top where the rose is, of course! And let's walk back through the Park. It will be nearly full by this time."

So they walked back through the Park and it *was* full—full to overflowing; nevertheless, amongst all the riders, drivers, sitters, strollers, and idlers, there appeared neither of the smart-looking gentlemen who had roused Nina's indignation by bowing to her in the morning, without having the honour of her acquaintance.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE OFFICERS' MESS.

A GIGANTIC sentry of Her Majesty's household cavalry paces up and down in front of the officers' quarters at Knightsbridge Barracks some two hours before watch-setting. It is fortunate that constant use has rendered him insensible to admiration. Few persons of either sex pass under his nose without a glance of unqualified approval. They marvel at his stature, his spurs, his carbine, his overalls, his plumed helmet, towering high above their heads, and the stupendous moustaches, on which this gentleman-private prides

himself more than on all the rest of his heroic attributes put together.

Beyond a shade of disciplined weariness, there is no expression whatever on his handsome face, yet it is to be presumed that the man has his thoughts too, like another. Is he back in Cumberland amongst his dales, a stalwart stripling, fishing some lonely stream within the hills, watching a bout at "knurr-and-spell" across the heather, or wrestling a fall in friendly rivalry with his cousin, a son of Anak, tall as himself? Does that purple sunset over Kensington Gardens remind him of Glaramara and Saddleback? Does that distant roar of wheels in Piccadilly recall the rush and ripple of the Solway charging up its tawny sands with the white horses all abreast in a spring-tide?

Perhaps he is wishing he was an officer with no kit to keep in order, no fatigue-duty to undergo, sitting merrily down to as good a dinner as luxury can provide, or a guest, of whom he has seen several pass his post in

starched white neckcloths and trim evening clothes. Perhaps he would not change with any of these, after all, when he reflects on his own personal advantages, his social standing amongst his comrades, his keen appreciation and large consumption of beer and tobacco, with the innumerable conquests he makes amongst maids and matrons in the middle and lower ranks of life. Such considerations, however, impress themselves not the least upon his outward visage. A statue could not look more imperturbable, and he turns his head but very slightly, with supreme indifference, when peals of laughter, more joyous than common, are wafted through the open windows of the mess-room, where some of our friends have fairly embarked on that tide of good-humour and hilarity which sets in with the second glass of champagne.

It is a full mess; the colonel himself sits at dinner, with two or three friends, old brothers-in-arms, whose soldierlike bearing and manly faces betray their antecedents, though they

may not have worn a uniform for months. A lately-joined cornet looks at these with a reverence that I am afraid could be extorted from him by no other institution on earth. The adjutant and riding-master, making holiday, are both present—"to the front," as they call it, enjoying exceedingly the jests and waggeries of their younger comrades. The orderly-officer, conspicuous by his belt, sits at one end of the long table. Lord Bearwarden occupies the other, supported on either side by his two guests, Tom Ryfe and Dick Stanmore. It is the night of Mrs. Stanmore's ball, and these last-named gentlemen are going there, with feelings how different, yet with the same object. Dick is full of confidence, elated and supremely happy. His entertainer experiences a quiet comfort and *bien-être* stealing over him, to which he has long been a stranger, while Tom Ryfe with every mouthful swallows down some emotion of jealousy, humiliation, or mistrust. Nevertheless, he is in the highest spirits of the three.

"I tell you nothing can touch him, my lord, when hounds run," says he, still harping on the merits of the horse he sold Lord Bearwarden in the Park. Of course half the party are talking of hunting, the other half of racing, soldiering, and women. "He'd have been thrown away on most of the fellows we know. He wants a good man on his back, for if you keep him fiddling behind, it breaks his heart. I always said you ought to have him—you or Mr. Stanmore. He's just the sort for both of you. I'm sorry to hear yours are all coming up at Tattersall's," adds Tom, with a courteous bow to the opposite guest. "Hope it's only to make room for some more."

Dick disclaims. "No, indeed," says he, "it's a *bonâ fide* sale—without reserve, you know—I am going to give the thing up!"

"Give up hunting!" expostulates a very young subaltern on Dick's left. "Why, you're not a soldier, are you? What shall you do with yourself? You have nothing to live for."

Overcome by this reflection, he empties his glass and looks feelingly in his neighbour's face.

"Are you so fond of it too?" asks Dick, with a smile.

"Fond of it! I believe you!" answers the boy. "What is there to be compared to it?—at least that I've tried, you know. I think the happiest fellow on earth is a master of fox-hounds, particularly if he hunts them himself: there's only one thing to beat it, and that's soldiering. I'd rather command such a regiment as this than be Emperor of China. Perhaps I shall, too, some day."

The real colonel, sitting opposite, overhears this military sentiment, and smiles good-humouredly at his zealous junior. "When you *are* in command," says he, "I hope you'll be down upon the cornets—they want a deal of looking up—I'm much too easy with them." The young soldier laughed and blushed. In his heart he thought the "chief," as he called him, the very greatest man in the world, offer-

ing him that respect combined with affection which goes so far to constitute the efficiency of a regiment, hoping hereafter to tread in his footsteps and carry out his system.

For ten whole minutes he held his tongue—and this was no small effort of self-restraint—that he might listen to the commanding officer's conversation with his guests, savouring strongly of professional interests, as comprising Crimean, Indian, and continental experiences, all tending to prove that cavalry massed, kept under cover, held well in hand, and "offered" at the critical moment, was *the* force to render success permanent and defeat irretrievable.

When they got into a dissertation on shoeing, with the comparative merits of "threes" and "sections" at drill, the young man refreshed himself liberally with champagne, and turned to more congenial discourse.

Of this there seemed no lack. The winner of the St. Leger was as confidently predicted as if the race were already in his owner's pocket. A match was made between two

splendid dandies, called respectfully by their comrades "Nobby" and "The Dustman," to walk from Knightsbridge Barracks to Windsor Bridge that day week—the odds being slightly in favour of "The Dustman," who was a peer of the realm. A moderate dancer was freely criticised, an exquisite singer approved with reservation, and the style of fighting practised by our present champion of the prize-ring unequivocally condemned. Presently a deep voice made itself heard in more sustained tones than belong to general conversation, and during a lull it became clear that the adjutant was relating an anecdote of his own military experience. "It's a wonderful country," said he, in reply to some previous observation. "I'm not an Irishman myself, but I've observed that the most conspicuous men in all nations are pure Irish or of Irish extraction. Look at the service. Look at the ring—prize-fighters and book-makers. I believe the Slasher's mother was born in Connaught, and nothing will convince me but that Deerfoot came

from Tipperary—east and west the world's full of them—they swarm, I'm told, in America, and I can answer for them in Europe. Did ye ever see a Turk in a vineyard? He's the very moral of Pat in a potato-garden: the same frieze coat—the same baggy breeches—the same occasional smoke, every five minutes or so—and the same rooted aversion to hard work. Go on into India—they're all over the place. Shall I tell you what happened to myself? We were engaged on the right of the army, getting it hot and heavy, all the horses with their heads up, but the men as steady as old Time. I was in the Lancers then, under Sir Hope. The Sikhs worked their guns beautifully, and presently we got the word to advance. It wasn't bad ground for manœuvring, and we were soon into them. The enemy fought a good one—those Sikhs always do. There was one fine old white-bearded patriarch stuck to his gun to the last. His people were all speared and cut down, but he never gave back an inch.

I can see him now, looking like the pictures of Abraham in my old Sunday-school book. I thought I'd save him if I could. Our chaps had got their blood up, and dashed in to finish him with their lances, but I kept them off with some difficulty, and offered him 'quarter.' I was afraid he wouldn't understand my language. 'Quarter,' says he, in the richest brogue you'll hear out of Cork—'quarter! you bloody thieves! will you stick a countryman, an' a comrade, ye murtherin' villains, like a *boneen* in a butcher's shop!' He'd have gone on, I dare say, for an hour, but the men had their lances through him before you could say 'knife.' As my right-of-threes, himself a Paddy, observed—he was discoorsin' the devil in less than five minutes. The man was a deserter and a renegade, so it served him right, but being an Irishman, you see, he distinguished himself—that's all I mean to infer."

The young officer was exceedingly attentive to an anecdote which, thus told by its bronzed,

war-worn, and soldier-like narrator, possessed the fascination of romance with the interest of reality.

Lord Bearwarden and his guests had also broken off their conversation to listen—they returned to the previous subject.

"There are so many people come to town now-a-days," said his lordship, "that the whole thing spoils itself. Society is broken up into sets, and even if you belong to the same set, you cannot insure meeting any particular person at any particular place. Just the same with clubs. I might hunt you two fellows about all night, from Arthur's to the Arlington —from the Arlington to White's—from White's to the Carlton—from the Carlton back to St. James's Street—and never run into you at all, unless I had the luck to find you drinking gin and soda at Pratt's."

Tom Ryfe, belonging only to the last-named of these resorts, looked gratified. Dick Stanmore was thinking of something else.

"Now, to-night," continued Lord Bear-

warden, turning to the latter, "although the ball is in your own stepmother's house, I'll take odds you don't know three-fourths of the people you'll meet, and yet you've been as much about London as most of us. Where they come from I can't think, and they're like the swallows, or the storks, or the woodcocks, only they're not so welcome. Where they'll go to when the season's over I neither know nor care."

Tom Ryfe would have given much to feel equally indifferent. Something like a pang shot through him as he reflected that for him the battle must be against wind and tide—a fierce struggle, more and more hopeless, to grasp at something drifting visibly out of reach. He was not a man, however, to be beat while it was possible to persist. Believing Dick Stanmore the great obstacle in his way, he watched that pre-occupied gentleman as a cat watches a mouse.

"I don't want to be introduced to any more people," said Dick, rather absently. "In my

opinion you can't have too few acquaintances and too many friends."

"One ought to know lots of *women*," said Mr. Ryfe, assuming the air of a fine gentleman, which fitted him, thought Lord Bearwarden, as ill as his uniform generally fits a civilian. "I mean women of position—who *give* things—whom you'd like to be seen talking to in the Park. As for girls, they're a bore—there's a fresh crop every season—they're exactly like each other, and you have to dance with 'em all!"

"Confound his impudence!" *thought* Lord Bearwarden; "does he hope to impose on *me* with his half-bred swagger, and Brummagem assurance?" but he only *said*, "I suppose, Tom, you're in great request with them—all ranks, all sorts, all ages! You fellows have such a pull over us poor soldiers; you can be improving the time while we're on guard."

Tom looked as if he rather believed he could. But he only *looked* it. Beneath that confident manner, his heart was sad and sink-

ing. How bitter he felt against Miss Bruce, and yet he loved her, in his own way too, all the while.

"Champagne to Mr. Stanmore!" said his entertainer, beckoning to a servant. "You're below the mark, Stanmore, and we've a heavy night before us. Your thinking of your pets at Tattersall's next week. Cheer up. Their future masters won't be half so hard on them, I'll be bound. But I wouldn't assist at the sacrifice if I were you. Come down to the Den with me; we'll troll for pike, and give the clods a cricket-match. Then we'll dine early, set trimmers, and console ourselves with claret-cup under affliction."

Dick laughed. Affliction, indeed, and he had never been so happy in his life! Perhaps that was the reason of his silence, his abstraction. At this very moment, he thought, Maud might be opening the packet he made such sacrifices to redeem. He had arranged for her to receive the diamonds all reset and glittering at the hour she would be dressing

for the ball. He could almost fancy he saw the beautiful face flushed with delight, the dark eyes filled with tears. Would she press those jewels to her lips, and murmur broken words of endearment for *him?* Would she not love him *now*, if, indeed, she had not loved him before? Horses, forsooth! What were all the horses that ever galloped compared to one smile of hers? He would have given her his right arm, his life, if she wanted it. And now, perhaps, he was to obtain his reward. Who could tell what that very night might bring forth?

Mr. Stanmore's glass remained untasted before him, and Lord Bearwarden observing that dinner was over, and his guests seemed disinclined to drink any more wine, proposed an adjournment to the little mess-room to smoke.

In these days the long sittings that delighted our grandfathers have completely given way to an early break up, a quiet cigar, and a general retreat, if not to bed, at least to other scenes and other society. In ten minutes from the rising of the colonel, Lord Bearwarden, and

half a dozen guests, the larger mess-room was cleared of its inmates, and the smaller one crowded with an exceedingly merry, and rather noisy assemblage.

"Just one cigar," said Lord Bearwarden, handing a huge case to his friends. "It will steady you nicely for waltzing, and some eau-de-Cologne in my room will take off all the smell afterwards. I know you dancing swells are very particular."

Both gentlemen laughed, and putting large cigars into their mouths, accommodated themselves with exceeding goodwill to the arrangement.

It was not in the nature of things that silence should be preserved under such incentives to conversation as tobacco and soda-water with something in it, but presently, above other sounds, a young voice was heard to clamour for a song.

"Let's have a chant!" protested this eager voice; "the night is still young. We're all musical, and we don't often get the two best

pipes in the regiment to dine here the same day. Come, tune up, old boy. Give us 'Twisting Jane,' or the 'Gallant Young Hussar.'"

The "old boy" addressed, a large, fine-looking man, holding the appointment of riding-master, smiled good-humouredly, and shook his head. "It's too early for 'The Hussar,'" said he, scanning the fresh, beardless face with its clear, mirthful eyes. "And it's not an improving song for young officers, neither. I'll try 'Twisting Jane,' if you gentlemen will support me with the chorus;" and in a deep, mellow voice he embarked without more ado on the following barrack-room ditty:—

"I loved a girl, down Windsor way,
When we was lying there,
As soft as silk, as mild as May,
As timid as a hare.
She blushed and smiled, looked down so shy,
And then—looked up again—
My comrades warned me—'Mind your eye,
With Twisting Jane!'

" I wooed her thus, not sure but slow,
To kiss she vowed a crime,—
For she was 'reining back,' you know,
While I was 'marking time.'
'Alas!' I thought, 'these dainty charms
Are not for me, 'tis plain;
Too long she keeps me under arms,
Does Twisting Jane.'

" Our corporal-major says to me,
One day before parade,
'She's gammoning you, young chap,' says he,
'Is that there artful jade!
You'll not be long of finding out,
When nothing's left to gain,
How quick the word is "Threes about!"
With Twisting Jane!'

" Our corporal-major knows what's what;
I peeped above her blind,
The tea was made—the toast was hot—
She looked so sweet and kind.
My captain in her parlour sat,
It gave me quite a pain!
With coloured clothes, and shining hat,
By Twisting Jane.

" The major he came cantering past,
She bustled out to see,—
'Oh, major! is it you at last?
Step in and take your tea.'

The major halted—winked his eye—
Looked up and down the lane,—
And in he went his luck to try
With Twisting Jane.

" I waited at ' attention ' there,
Thinks I, ' There'll soon be more,'
The colonel's phaeton and pair
Came grinding to the door.
She gave him such a sugary smile,
(Old men is very vain !)
' It's you I looked for all the while,'
Says Twisting Jane.

" ' I've done with you for good,' I cried,
' You're never on the square ;
Fight which you please on either side,
But hang it, lass, fight fair !
I won't be last—I can't be first—
So look for me in vain
When next you're out " upon the burst,"
Miss Twisting Jane !—
When next you're out " upon the burst,"
Miss Twisting Jane !' "

" A jolly good song," cried the affable young gentleman who had instigated the effort, adding, with a quaint glance at the grizzled visage and

towering proportions of the singer, "you're very much improved, old chap—not so shy, more power, more volume. If you mind your music, I'll get you a place as a chorister-boy in the Chapel Royal, after all. You're just the size, and your manners the very thing!"

"Wait till I get *you* in the school with that new charger," answered the other, laughing. "I think, gentlemen, it's my call. I'll ask our adjutant here to give us 'Boots and Saddles,' you all like that game."

Tumblers were arrested in mid-air, cigars taken from smooth or hairy lips, while all eyes were turned towards the adjutant, a soldier down to his spurs, who "tuned up," as universally requested, without delay.

BOOTS AND SADDLES.

"The ring of a bridle, the stamp of a hoof,
Stars above, and a wind in the tree,—
A bush for a billet,—a rock for a roof,—
Outpost duty's the duty for me!

Listen. A stir in the valley below—
The valley below is with riflemen crammed,
Covering the column and watching the foe—
Trumpet-major!—Sound and be d—d!
Stand to your horses!—It's time to begin—
Boots and Saddles! The Pickets are in!

" Though our bivouac-fire has smouldered away,
Yet a bit of good 'baccy shall comfort us well;
When you sleep in your cloak there's no lodging to pay,
And where we shall breakfast the devil can tell!
But the horses were fed, 'ere the daylight had gone,
There's a slice in the embers—a drop in the can—
Take a suck of it, comrade! and so pass it on,
For a ration of brandy puts heart in a man.
Good liquor is scarce, and to waste it a sin,—
Boots and Saddles! The Pickets are in!

" Hark! there's a shot from the crest of the hill!
Look! there's a rocket leaps high in the air.
By the beat of his gallop, that's nearing us still,
That runaway horse has no rider, I'll swear!
There's a jolly light-infantry post on the right,
I hear their bugles—they sound the 'Advance.'
They will tip us a tune that shall wake up the night,
And we're hardly the lads to leave out of the dance.
They're at it already, I'm sure, by the din,—
Boots and Saddles! The Pickets are in!

" They don't give us long our divisions to prove—
  Short, sharp, and distinct, comes the word of command.
' Have your men in the saddle—Be ready to move—
  Keep the squadron together—the horses in hand—'
While a whisper's caught up in the ranks as they form—
  A whisper that fain would break out in a cheer—
How the foe is in force, how the work will be warm.
  But, steady! the chief gallops up from the rear.
With old ' Death-or-Glory ' to fight is to win,
  And the Colonel means mischief, I see by his grin.—
Boots and Saddles! The Pickets are in!—
  Boots and Saddles! The Pickets are in!"

"And it must be 'Boots and Saddles' with us," said Lord Bearwarden to his guests as the applause subsided and he made a move towards the door, "otherwise we shall be the 'lads to leave out of the dance,' and I fancy that would suit none of us to-night."

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. STANMORE AT HOME.
DANCING.

AMONGST all the magnificent toilettes composed to do honour to the lady whose card of invitation heads this chapter none appeared more variegated in colour, more startling in effect, than that of Mrs. Puckers the maid.

True, circumstances compelled her to wear a high dress, but even this modest style of costume in the hands of a real artist admits of marvellous combinations and extraordinary

breadth of treatment. Mrs. Puckers had disposed about her person as much ribbon, tulle, and cheap jewelry as might have fitted out a fancy fair. Presiding in a little breakfast-room off the hall, pinning tickets on short red cloaks, shaking out skirts of wondrous fabrication, and otherwise assisting those beautiful guests who constituted the entertainment, she afforded a sight only equalled by her after-performances in the tea-room, where, assuming the leadership of a body of handmaidens almost as smart as herself, she formed, for several waggish and irreverent young gentlemen, a principal attraction in that favourite place of resort.

A ball is so far like a run with fox-hounds that it is difficult to specify the precise moment at which the sport begins. Its votaries gather by twos and threes attired for pursuit; there is a certain amount of refitting practised, as regards dress and appointments, while some of the keenest in the chase are nevertheless the latest arrivals at the place of meeting. Pre-

sently are heard a note or two, a faint flourish, a suggestive prelude. Three or four couples get cautiously to work, the music swells, the pace increases, ere long the excitement extends to all within sight or hearing, and a performance of exceeding speed, spirit, and severity is the result.

Puckers, with her mouth full of pins, is rearranging the dress of a young lady in her first season, to whom, as to the inexperienced hunter, that burst of music is simply maddening. She is a well-bred young lady, however, and keeps her raptures to herself, but is slightly indignant at the very small notice taken of her by Dick Stanmore, who rushes into the tiring-room, drops a flurried little bow, and hurries Puckers off into a corner, totally regardless of the displeasure with which a calm, cold-looking chaperon regards this unusual proceeding.

"Did it come in time?" says Dick in a loud agitated whisper. "Did you run up with it directly? Was she pleased? Did she say anything? Has she got them on now?"

"Lor, Mr. Stanmore!" exclaims Puckers, "whatever do you mean?"

"Miss Bruce—the diamonds," explains Dick, in a voice that causes two dandies, recently arrived, to pause in astonishment on the staircase.

"Oh! the diamonds!" answers Puckers. "Only think now. Was it *you*, sir? Well, I never. Why, sir, when Miss Bruce opens the packet, not half an hour ago, the tears comes into her eyes, and she says, 'Well, this *is* kind'—them was her very words—'this *is* kind,' says she, and pops 'em on that moment; for I'd done her hair and all. Go up stairs, Mr. Stanmore, and see how she looks in them. I'll wager she's waiting for Somebody to dance with her this very minute!"

Though it is too often of sadly short duration, every man *has* his "good time" for a few blissful seconds during life. Let him not complain they are so brief. It is something to have at least tasted the cup, and perhaps it is better to turn with writhing lips from the bitter

drop near the brim than, drinking it fairly out, to find its sweets pall on the palate, its essence cease to warm the heart and stimulate the brain.

Dick, hurrying past his mother into the soft, mellow, yet brilliant radiance of her crowded ball-room, felt for that moment the happiest man in London.

Miss Bruce was *not* waiting to dance with him, according to her maid's prediction, but was performing a waltz in exceeding gravity, assisted, as Dick could not help observing with a certain satisfaction, by the ugliest man in the room. The look she gave him when their eyes met at last sent this shortsighted young gentleman up to the seventh heaven. It seemed well worth all the hunters in Leicestershire, all the diamonds in Golconda! He did the honours of his stepmother's house, and thanked his own friends for coming, but all with the vague consciousness of a man in a dream. Presently the "round" dance came to an end, much to the relief of the ugly man,

who cared, indeed, for ladies as little as ladies cared for him, and Dick hastened to secure Miss Bruce as a partner for the approaching "square." She was engaged, of course, six deep, but she put off all her claimants and took Mr. Stanmore's arm. "He's my cousin, you know," said she, with her rare smile, "and cousins don't count; so you're all merely put back *one*. If you don't like it, you needn't come for it—*C'est tout simple!*"

Then they took their places, and the dark eyes looked full into his own. Dick felt he was winning in a canter.

Miss Bruce put her hand on the collar of diamonds round her neck. "I'm glad you're *not* my cousin," she said; "I'm glad you're not *really* a relation. You're far dearer as it is. You're the best friend and truest gentleman I ever met in my life. Now I shan't thank you any more. Mind your dancing, and set to that gawky woman opposite. Isn't she badly dressed?"

How could Dick tell? He didn't even know

he had a *vis-à-vis*, and the "gawky v
as Miss Bruce most unjustly called h
wondered anybody could make such l
in so simple a figure as the *Eté.* H
was in a whirl. A certain chivalrous
warned him that this was no time, v
idol lay under a heavy obligation, to p
suit. Yet he could not, for the life
help venturing a word.

"I look at nobody but you," he a
turning pale as men do when they a
earnest. "I should never wish to
other face than yours for the rest of m

"How tired you'd get of it," said sh
bright smile; but she timed her reply
embark immediately afterwards on the
des Dames, a measure exceedingly ill c
for sustained conversation, and chan
subject directly she returned to his sid

"Where did you dine?" she asked,
"With those wild young men at the l
I suppose. I knew you would: and
all sorts of horrid things, drank and sm

I'm *sure* you smoked." She put her laced handkerchief laughingly to her nose.

"I dined with Bearwarden," answered honest Dick, "and he's coming on here directly with a lot of them. My mother will be so pleased —it's going to be a capital ball."

"I thought Lord Bearwarden never went to balls," replied the young lady, carelessly; but her heart swelled with gratified vanity to think of the attraction that drew him now to every place where he could hear her voice and look upon her beauty.

"There he is," was her partner's comment, as his lordship's head appeared in the doorway. "We'll have one more dance, Miss Bruce—Maud—before the night is over?"

"As many as you please," was her answer, and still Dick felt he had the race in hand and was winning in a canter.

People go to balls for pleasure, no doubt, but it must be admitted, nevertheless, that the pleasure they seek there is of a delusive kind and lasts but for a few minutes at a time.

Mr. Stanmore's whole happiness was centred in Miss Bruce, yet it was impossible for him to neglect all his stepmother's guests because of his infatuation for one, nor would the usages of society's Draconic laws, that are not to be broken, permit him to haunt that one presence, which turned to magic a scene otherwise only ludicrous for an hour or so, and simply wearisome as it went on.

So Dick plunged into the thick of it, and did his duty manfully, diving at partners right and left, yet, with a certain characteristic loyalty, selecting the least attractive amongst the ladies for his attentions. Thus it happened that as the rooms became crowded, and half the smartest people in London surged and swayed upon the staircase, he lost sight of the face he loved for a considerable period, and was able to devote much real energy to the success of his stepmother's ball, uninfluenced by the distraction of Miss Bruce's presence.

This young lady's movements, however, were not unobserved. Puckers, from her position

behind the cups and saucers, enjoyed great reconnoitring opportunities, which she did not suffer to escape unimproved—the tea-room, she was aware, held an important place in the working machinery of society, as a sort of neutral territory, between the cold civilities of the ball-room and the warmer interest fostered by juxta-position in the boudoir, not to mention a wicked little alcove beyond, with low red velvet seats, and a subdued light suggestive of whispers and provoking question rather than reply.

Puckers was not easily surprised. In the housekeeper's room she often thanked her stars for this desirable immunity, and indeed on the present occasion had furnished a loving couple with tea, whose united ages would have come hard upon a century, without moving a muscle of her countenance, albeit there was something ludicrous to general society in the affectation of concealment with which this long-recognised attachment had to be carried on. The gentleman was bald and corpulent. The lady

—well, the lady had been a beauty thirty years ago, and dressed the character still. There was nothing to prevent their seeing each other every day and all day long, if they chose, yet they preferred scheming for invitation to the same places, that they might meet *en evidence* before the public; and dearly loved, as now, a retirement into the tea-room, where they could enact their *rôle* of turtle-doves, uninterrupted, yet not entirely unobserved.

Perhaps, after all, this imaginary restraint afforded the little spice of romance that preserved their attachment from decay.

Puckers, I say, marvelled at these not at all, but she did marvel, and admitted it, when Miss Bruce, entering the tea-room, was seen to be attended, not by Mr. Stanmore, but by Lord Bearwarden.

Her dark eyes glittered, and there was an exceedingly becoming flush on the girl's fair face, usually so pale. Her maid thought she had never seen Maud look so beautiful, and to judge by the expression of his countenance, it

would appear Lord Bearwarden thought so too. They had been dancing together, and he seemed to be urging her to dance with him again. His lordship's manner was more eager than common, and in his eyes came an anxious expression that only one woman, the one woman it was so difficult to forget, had ever been able to call into them before.

"Look odd!" he repeated, while he set down her cup and gave her back the fan he had been holding. "I thought you were above all that, Miss Bruce, and did what you liked, without respect to the fools who stare and can't understand."

She drew up her head with a proud gesture peculiar to her. "How do you know I do like it?" said she, haughtily.

He looked hurt, and lowered his voice to a whisper. "Forgive me," he said, "I have no right to suppose it. I have been presumptuous, and you are entitled to be unkind. I have monopolized you too much, and you're—you're bored with me. It's my own fault."

"I never said so," she answered in the same tone; "who is unkind now?" Then the dark eyes were raised for one moment to look full in his, and it was all over with Lord Bearwarden.

"You will dance with me again before I go," said he, recovering his former position with an alacrity that denoted some previous practice. "I shall ask nobody else—why should I? You know I only came here to see *you*. One waltz, Miss Bruce—promise!"

"I promise," she answered, and again came into her eyes that smile which so fascinated her admirers to their cost. "I shall get into horrid disgrace for it, and so I shall for sitting here so long now. I'm always doing wrong. However, I'll risk it if you will."

Her manner was playful, almost tender; and Puckers, adding another large infusion of tea, wondered to see her look so soft and kind.

A crowded waltz was in course of performance, and the tea-room, but for this preoccupied couple, would have been empty.

Two men looked in as they passed the door, the one hurried on in search of his partner, the other started, scowled, and turned back amongst the crowd. Puckers, the lynx-eyed, observing and recognizing both, had sufficient skill in physiognomy to pity Mr. Stanmore and much mistrust Tom Ryfe.

The former, indeed, felt a sharp, keen pang, when he saw the face that so haunted him in close proximity to another face belonging to one who, if he should enter for the prize, could not but prove a dangerous rival. Nevertheless, the man's generous instincts stifled and kept down so unworthy a suspicion, forcing himself to argue against his own conviction that, at this very moment, the happiness of his life was hanging by a thread. He resolved to ignore everything of the kind. Jealousy was a bad beginning for a lover, and after all, if he should allow himself to be jealous of every man who admired and danced with Maud, life would be unbearable. How despicable, besides, would she hold such a sentiment! With

her disposition, how would she resent anything like *espionage* or *surveillance!* How unworthy it seemed both of herself and of him! In two minutes he was heartily ashamed of his momentary discomfiture, and plunged energetically once more into the duties of the ball-room. Nevertheless, from that moment, the whole happiness of the evening had faded out for Dick.

There is a light irradiating all such gatherings which is totally irrespective of gas or wax candles. It can shed a mellow lustre on dingy rooms, frayed carpets, and shabby furniture; nay, I have seen its tender rays impart a rare and spiritual beauty to an old, worn, long-loved face; but on the other hand, when this magic light is quenched or even temporarily shaded, not all the illuminations of a royal birthday are brilliant enough to dispel the gloom its absence leaves about the heart.

Mr. Stanmore, though whirling a very handsome young lady through a waltz, began to think it was not such a good ball after all.

Tom Ryfe, on the other hand, congratulated himself on his tactics in having obtained an invitation, not without considerable pressure put upon Miss Bruce, for a gathering, of which his social standing hardly entitled him to form a part. He was now, so to speak, on the very ground occupied by the enemy, and though he saw defeat imminent, could at least make his own effort to avert it. After all his misgivings as regarded Stanmore, it seemed that he had been mistaken, and that Lord Bearwarden was the rival he ought to dread. In any case but his own, Mr. Ryfe was a man of the world quite shrewd enough to have reasoned that in this duality of admirers there was encouragement and hope. But Tom had lost his heart, such as it was; and his head, though of much better material, had naturally gone with it. Like other gamblers, he determined to follow his ill-luck to the utmost, bring matters to a crisis, and so know the worst. In all graver affairs of life, it is doubtless good sense to look a difficulty in the face; but in

the amusements of love and play practised hands leave a considerable margin for that uncertainty which constitutes the very essence of both pastimes; and this is why, perhaps, the man in earnest has the worst chance of winning at either game.

So Tom Ryfe turned back into the crowd, and waited his opportunity for a few minutes' conversation with Miss Bruce.

It came at last. She had danced through several engagements, the night was waning, and a few carriages had already been called up. Maud occupied the extreme end of a bench, from which a party of ladies had just risen to go away; she had declined to dance, and for the moment was alone. Tom slipped into the vacant seat by her side and thus cut her off from the whole surrounding world. A waltz requiring much terrific accompaniment of brass instruments pealed out its deafening strains within ten feet of them, and in no desert island could there have been less likelihood that their conversation would be overheard.

Miss Bruce looked very happy, and in thorough good-humour. Tom Ryfe opened the trenches quietly enough.

"You haven't danced with me the whole evening," said he, with only rather a bitter inflection of voice.

"You never asked me," was the natural rejoinder.

"And I'm not going to ask you now," proceeded Mr. Ryfe; "you and I, Miss Bruce, have something more than a mere dancing acquaintance, I think."

An impatient movement, a slight curl of the lip, was the only answer.

"You may drop an acquaintance when you are tired of him, or a friend when he gets troublesome. It's done every day. It's very easy, Miss Bruce."

He spoke in a tone of irony that roused her.

"Not so easy," she answered, with tightening lips, "when people have no tact—when they are not *gentlemen*."

The taunt went home. The beauty of Mr. Ryfe's face was at no time in its expression—certainly not now. Miss Bruce, too, seemed well disposed to fight it out. Obviously it must be war to the knife!

"Did you get my letter?" said he, in low, distinct syllables. "Do you believe I mean what I say? Do you believe I mean what I *write?*"

She smiled scornfully. A panting couple who stopped just in front of them imagined they were interrupting a flirtation, and, doing as they would be done by, twirled on.

"I treat all begging-letters alike," answered Maud, "and make yours no exception, because they contain threats and abuse into the bargain. You have chosen the wrong person to try and frighten, Mr. Ryfe. It only shows how little you understand my character."

He would have caught at a straw even then. "How little chance I have had of studying it!" he exclaimed. "It is not my fault. Heaven knows I have been kept in ignorance, un-

certainty, suspense, till it almost drove me mad. Miss Bruce, you have known the worst of me; only the worst of me, indeed, as yet."

The man was pleading for his life, you see. Was it pitiable, or only ludicrous, that his voice and manner had to be toned down to the staid pitch of general conversation, that a fat and happy German was puffing at a cornet-à-piston within arm's length of him? But for a quiver of his lip, any bystander might have supposed he was asking Miss Bruce if he should bring her an ice.

"I have seen enough!" she replied, very resolutely, "and I am determined to see no more. Mr. Ryfe, if you have no pleasanter subjects of conversation than yourself and your arrangements, I will ask you to move for an instant that I may pass and find Mrs. Stanmore."

Lord Bearwarden was at the other end of the room, looking about apparently for some object of unusual interest. Perhaps Miss Bruce saw him—as ladies do see people without

turning their eyes—and the sight fortified her resolution.

"Then you defy me!" whispered Tom, in the low suppressed tones that denote rage, concentrated and intensified for being kept down. "By Heaven, Miss Bruce, you shall repent it! I'll show you up! I'll expose you! I'll have neither pity nor remorse! You think you've won a heavy stake, do you? Hooked a big fish, and need only pull him ashore? *He* shan't be deceived! *He* shall know you for what you are! He shall, by ——!"

The adjuration with which Mr. Ryfe concluded this little ebullition was fortunately drowned to all ears but those for which it was intended by a startling flourish on the cornet-à-piston. Miss Bruce accepted the challenge readily. "Do your worst!" said she, rising with a scornful bow, and taking Lord Bearwarden's arm, much to that gentleman's delight, walked haughtily away.

Perhaps this declaration of open war may have decided her subsequent conduct; perhaps

it was only the result of those circumstances which form the meshes of a certain web we call Fate. Howbeit, Miss Bruce was too tired to dance. Miss Bruce would like to sit down in a cool place. Miss Bruce would not be bored with Lord Bearwarden's companionship, not for an hour, not for a week—no, not for a lifetime!

Dick Stanmore, taking a lady down to her carriage, saw them sitting alone in the tea-room, now deserted by Puckers and her assistants. His honest heart turned very sick and cold. Half an hour after, passing the same spot, they were there still; and then, I think, he knew that he was overtaken by the first misfortune of his life.

Later, when the ball was over, and he had wished Mrs. Stanmore good-night, he went up to Maud with a grave, kind face.

"We never had our waltz, Miss Bruce," said he; "and—and—there's *a reason*, isn't there?"

He was white to his very lips. Through all

her triumph, she felt a twinge, far keener than she expected, of compunction and remorse.

"Oh, Dick!" she said, "I couldn't help it! Lord Bearwarden proposed to me in that room."

"And you accepted him?" said Dick, trying to steady his voice, wondering why he felt half suffocated all the time.

"And I accepted him!"

END OF VOL. I.

LONDON: PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, STAMFORD STREET AND CHARING CROSS.

My Little Lady

MY LITTLE LADY.

Thy sinless progress, through a world
By sorrow darken'd and by care disturb'd,
Apt likeness bears to hers through gather'd clouds
Moving untouch'd in silver purity.

WORDSWORTH.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
1871.

The right of Translation is reserved.

250. g. 199.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY MACDONALD AND TUGWELL, BLENHEIM HOUSE,
BLENHEIM STREET, OXFORD STREET.

TO

J. C. I.

MY LITTLE LADY.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE GARDEN.

THERE are certain days in the lives of each one of us, which come in their due course without special warning, to which we look forward with no anticipations of peculiar joy or sorrow, from which beforehand we neither demand nor expect more than the ordinary portion of good and evil, and which yet through some occurrence—unconsidered perhaps at the moment, but gaining in significance with years and connecting events—are destined to live apart in our memories to the end of our existence. Such a day in Horace Graham's life was a

certain hot Sunday in August, that he spent at the big hotel at Chaudfontaine.

Every traveller along the great high road leading from Brussels to Cologne knows Chaudfontaine, the little village distant about six miles from Liége, with its church, its big hotel, and its scattered cottages, partly forges, partly restaurants, which shine white against a dark green background of wooded hills, and gleam reflected in the clear tranquil stream by which they stand. On every side the hills seem to fold over and enclose the quiet green valley; the stream winds and turns, the long poplar-bordered road follows its course; amongst the hills are more valleys, more streams, woods, forests, sheltered nooks, tall grey limestone rocks, spaces of cornfields, and bright meadows. Everyone admires the charming scenery as the train speeds across it, through one tunnel after another; but there are few amongst our

countrymen who care to give it more than a passing glance of admiration, or to tarry in the quiet little village even for an hour, in their great annual rush to Spa, or the Rhine, or Switzerland. As a rule one seldom meets Englishmen at Chaudfontaine, and it was quite by chance that Horace Graham found himself there. An accident to a goods train had caused a detention of several hours all along the line, as he was travelling to Brussels, and it was by the advice of a Belgian fellow-passenger that he had stopped at Chaudfontaine, instead of going on to Liége, as he had at first proposed doing, on hearing from the guard that it was the furthest point that could be reached that night.

Behind the hotel lies a sunshiny shady garden, with benches and tables set under the trees near the house, and beyond, an unkempt lawn, a sort of wilderness of grass and shrubs and trees, with clumps of dark

and light foliage against the more uniform green of the surrounding hills, and it was still cool and pleasant when Graham wandered into it after breakfast on that Sunday morning, whilst all in front of the hotel was already basking in the hot sunshine. He had gone to bed the night before with the fixed intention of leaving by the earliest morning train, for his first impressions of Chaudfontaine had not been cheerful ones. It was nearly midnight when, with his companions, he had crossed the bridge that connects the railway station with the hotel on the opposite side of the stream, and scarcely a light was shining from the windows of the dim white building before him; he was very tired, rather cross, and disposed to grumble at the delay in his journey; and the general aspect of things—the bad supper, the sleepy waiter carrying a candle up flights of broad shallow wooden

stairs, and down a long passage to a remote room barely furnished, the uncertain view of a foreground of rustling poplars, and close behind them a black silent mass of hill—all these had not tended to encourage him.

But a man must be very cynical, or very *blasé*, or wholly possessed by some other uncomfortable quality, who does not feel much cheered and invigorated by morning sunbeams pouring into a strange bed-room, and awakening him to new scenes and unexperienced sensations. Horace Graham was neither cynical nor *blasé;* on the contrary, he was a pleasant-tempered, fresh-hearted lad of twenty or thereabouts, who only three weeks before had made his first acquaintance with French gendarmes, and for the first time had heard children shouting to each other in a foreign tongue along white-walled, sunshiny, foreign

streets. Three weeks touring in Germany had only served to arouse in him a passion for travelling and seeing, for new places and peoples and scenes, that in all his life, perhaps, would not be satiated; everything was new to him, everything amused him; and so it happened that, while he was dressing and studying from his window the view that had been only obscurely hinted at in the darkness of the night before, a sudden desire came over him to remain where he was for that day, climb the hills that rose before him, and see what manner of country lay beyond.

It was still early when, after breakfasting by himself in the salle-à-manger, he found his way into the garden; no one was stirring, it seemed deserted; he wandered along the gravel paths, trod down the tall grass as he crossed the lawn, and arrived at the confines of the little domain. On two

sides it was bounded by a narrow stream, separating it from the road beyond; at the angle of the garden the shallow, trickling water widened into a little fall crossed by a few planks; there were trees and bushes on each side, and the grassy garden bank sloped down to the stream. It was very green, and peaceful and dewy. Horace stood still for a minute looking at the flickering lights and shadows, and watching the dash and current of the water.

"*Fi donc, Mademoiselle, tu n'es pas raisonnable,*" cries a sweet shrill little voice close to him, "*tu es vraiment insupportable aujourd'hui.*"

He turned round and saw a child between five and six years old, dressed in a shabby little merino frock and white pinafore, standing with her back towards him, and holding out a doll at arm's length, its turned-out pink leather toes just touching the ground.

"*Veux-tu bien être sage?*" continues the small monitress with much severity, "*encore une fois, un, deux, trois!*" and she made a little dancing-step backwards; then with an air of encouragement, "*Allons, mon amie, du courage!* We must be perfect in our steps for this evening, for you know, Sophie, if you refuse to dance, M. le Prince will be in despair, and M. le Baron will put his hand on his heart and cry, 'Alas, mademoiselle, you have no pity, and my heart is desolated!'"

"Madelon!" cries a voice through the trees in the distance.

"*Me voici*, papa!" she answered, stopping the dancing-lesson and looking round. As she did so she caught sight of Horace, and gazed up in his face with a child's deliberate stare. She had great brown eyes, a little round fair face, and light hair curling all over her head. She looked up at him quite

fearlessly for a moment, and then darted away, dashing against somebody who was coming along the path, and disappeared.

"Take care, *ma petite;* you nearly knocked me down!" cried a good-humoured voice, belonging to a large gentleman with a ruddy face, and black hair and beard. "Ah! good morning, Monsieur," he continued as he approached Horace; "I rejoice to see that you have not yet quitted Chaudfontaine, as you spoke of doing last night."

"I have changed my mind," said Horace, smiling as he recognized his fellow-traveller of the night before. "I think of staying here to-day, and not leaving for Brussels till to-morrow morning."

"You will not regret it," said his companion, as they turned back towards the hotel, and walked on slowly together; "it is true there is not much here to tempt you during the day; but numbers will arrive

for the four o'clock *table-d'hôte*. In the evening there will be quite a little society, and we shall dance. I assure you, monsieur, that we also know how to be gay at Chaudfontaine."

"I don't doubt it," answered Graham; "and though I don't care much about dancing——"

"You don't care about dancing?" interrupted the Belgian with astonishment; "but that is of your nation, Monsieur. You are truly an extraordinary people, you English; you travel, you climb, you ride, you walk, and you do not dance!"

"I think we dance too, sometimes," said the young Englishman, laughing; "but I own that it is walking I care for most just now—the country about here seems to be wonderfully pretty."

"In fact it is not bad," said the Belgian, with the air of paying it a compliment;

"and if you take care to return in time for the four o'clock *table-d'hôte*, you cannot do better than make a little promenade to gain an appetite for dinner. I can promise you an excellent one—they keep an admirable cook. I entreat of you not to think of leaving for Brussels; and precisely you cannot go," he added, drawing out his watch, "for it is just the hour that the train leaves, and I hear the whistle at this moment."

And, in fact, though they could not see the train from where they stood, they heard its shrill whistle as it rushed into the station on the other side of the river.

"So it is decided," said Graham, "and I remain."

"And you do wisely, Monsieur," cried his companion; "believe me, you will not regret passing a day in this charming little spot. Do they speak much in England of Chaudfontaine, monsieur?"

"Well, no," Horace was obliged to acknowledge, "they do not."

"Ah!" said the Belgian, a little disappointed; "but they speak of Brussels, perhaps?"

"Oh! yes, every one knows Brussels," answered Graham.

"It is a beautiful city," remarked his companion, "and has a brilliant society; but for my part, I own that at this season of the year I prefer the retirement, the tranquillity of Chaudfontaine, where also one amuses oneself perfectly well. I always spend two or three months here—in fact, have been here for six weeks already this summer. Affairs called me to Aix-la-Chapelle last week for a few days, and that was how I had the good fortune to meet Monsieur last night."

"It was very lucky for me," said Horace. "I am delighted to be here. The hotel

seems to be very empty," he added. "I have seen nobody this morning except one little girl."

"But no, the hotel is almost full—people are gone to mass, perhaps, or are in bed, or are breakfasting. It is still early."

"That little girl," said Horace—"does she belong to the house?"

"You mean the little girl who ran against me as I came up to you just now? No, the *propriétaire* of the hotel has but one daughter, Mademoiselle Cécile, a most amiable person. But I know that child—her father is one of the *habitués* of the hotel. She is much to be pitied, poor little one!"

"Why?" asked Graham.

"Because her father—*ah! bon jour, Madame*—excuse me, Monsieur, but I go to pay my respects to Madame la Comtesse!" cried the Belgian, as an elderly red-faced

lady, with fuzzy sandy hair, wearing a dingy, many-flounced lilac barége gown, came towards them along the gravel path.

"At last we see you back, my dear Monsieur!" she cried—"ah! how many regrets your absence has caused!—of what an insupportable *ennui* have we not been the victims! But you are looking better than when you left us; your journey has done you good; it is plain that you have not suffered from absence."

"Alas! Madame," cries the other, "you little know! And how, for my part, can I venture to believe in regrets that have left no traces? Madame is looking more charming, more blooming——"

Horace waited to hear no more; he left the pair standing and complimenting each other on the sunny pathway, and wandered away under the shade of the big trees, crossed the little stream and the white

dusty road beyond, and began to ascend the hills.

"What an ugly old woman!" thought the lad. "She and my friend seem to be great allies; she must be at least ten years older than he is, and he talks to her as if she were a pretty girl; but she is a Countess apparently, and I suppose that counts for something. Oh! what a jolly country!"

He strode along whistling, with his hands in his pockets, feeling as if he had the world before him to explore, and in the happiest of moods. Such a mood was not rare with Horace Graham in these youthful days, when, by force of good health and good spirits, and a large capacity for fresh genuine enjoyment, he was apt to find life pleasant enough on the whole, though for him it lacked several of the things that go to make up the ordinary ideal of human happiness. He was not rich; he had no

particular expectations, and but few family ties, for his parents had both died when he was very young, and except an aunt who had brought him up, and a married sister several years older than himself, he had no near relations in the world. He was simply a medical student, with nothing to look forward to but pushing his own way, and making his own path in life as best he could. But he had plenty of talent, and worked hard at his profession, to which he was devoted for reasons quite unconnected with any considerations of possible profit and loss. Indeed, having just enough money of his own to make him tolerably independent, he was wont to ignore all such considerations in his grand youthful way, and to look upon his profession from a purely abstract scientific point of view. And yet he was not without large hopes, grand vague ambitions concerning his future

career; for he was at an age when it seems so much easier to become one of the few enumerated great ones of the world than to remain amongst the nameless forgotten multitudes; and life lay before him rather as something definite, which he could take up and fashion to his own pleasure, than as a succession of days and years which would inevitably mould and influence him in their course. It is not wholly conceit, perhaps, which so assures these clever lads of the vastness of their untried capabilities, that there are moments when they feel as if they could grasp heaven and earth in their wide consciousness; it is rather a want of experience and clearness of perception. Horace Graham was not particularly conceited, and yet, in common with many other men of his age, he had a conviction that, in some way or other, life had great exceptional prizes in store for him; and indeed he was

so strong, and young, and honest-hearted, that he had been successful enough hitherto within his narrow limits. He had pleasant manners, too, and a pleasant face, which gained him as many friends as he ever cared to have; for he had a queer, reserved, unsociable twist in his character, which kept him aloof from much company, and rather spoilt his reputation for geniality and heartiness. He hated the hard work he had to go through in society; so at least he was wont to grumble, and then would add, laughing, "I daresay I am a conceited puppy to say so; but the fact is, there are not six people in the world whose company I would prefer to my own for a whole day."

He found his own company quite sufficient during all his wanderings through that long summer's day in the lovely country round Chaudfontaine, a country neither grand nor wild, hardly romantic, but with

a charm of its own that enticed Graham onwards in spite of the hot August sun. It was so green, so peaceful, so out of the world; the little valleys were wrapped so closely amongst the hills, the streams came gushing out of the limestone rocks, dry water courses led him higher and higher up amongst the silent woods, which stretched away for miles on either hand. Sometimes he would come upon an open space, whence he could look down upon the broader valley beneath, with its quiet river flowing through the midst, reflecting white villages, forges, long rows of poplars, an occasional bridge, and here and there a long low island; or descending, he would find himself in some narrow ravine, cleft between grey rocky heights overgrown with brushwood and trailing plants, the road leading beside a marshy brook, full of rushes and forget-me-nots, and disappearing amongst the forest trees. All day long Graham wander-

ed about that pleasant land, and it was long past the four o'clock dinner hour when he stood on the top of the hill he had seen that morning from his window, and looked across the wide view of woods and cornfields to where a distant cloud of smoke marked the city of Liége. Thence descending by a steep zig-zag path, with a bench at every angle, he crossed the road and the little rivulet, and found himself once more in the garden at the back of the hotel.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE SALON.

HE had left it in the morning dewy, silent, almost deserted; he found it full of gaiety and life and movement, talking, laughing, and smoking going on, pretty bright dresses glancing amongst the trees, children swinging under the great branches, the flickering lights and shadows dancing on their white frocks and curly heads, white-capped bonnes dangling their *bébés*, papas drinking coffee and liqueurs at the little tables, mammas talking the latest Liége scandal, and discussing the newest Parisian

fashions. The table-d'hôte dinner was just over, and everybody had come out to enjoy the air, till it was time for the dancing to begin.

The glass door leading into the passage that ran through the house stood wide open; so did the great hall door at the other end; and Graham could see the courtyard full of sunshine, the iron railing separating it from the road, the river gleaming, the bridge and railway station beyond, and then again the background of hills. He passed through the house, and went out into the courtyard. Here were more people, more gay dresses, gossip, cigars, and coffee; more benches and tables set in the scanty shade of the formal round-topped trees that stood in square green boxes round the paved quadrangle. Outside in the road, a boy with a monkey stood grinding a melancholy organ; the sun seemed setting to the pretty pathetic tune,

which mingled not inharmoniously with the hum of voices and sudden bursts of laughter; the children were jumping and dancing to their lengthening shadows, but with a measured glee, so as not to disturb too seriously the elaborate combination of starch and ribbon and shining plaits which composed their fête day toilettes. A small tottering thing of two years old, emulating its companions of larger growth, toppled over and fell lamenting at Graham's feet as he came out. He picked it up, and set it straight again, and then, to console it, found a *sou*, and showed it how to put it into the monkey's brown skinny hand, till the child screamed with delight instead of woe. The lad had a kind, loving heart, and was tender to all helpless appealing things, and more especially to little children.

He stood watching the pretty glowing scene for a few minutes, and then went in

to his solitary *réchauffé* dinner. Coming out again half an hour or so later, he found everything changed. The monkey boy and his organ were gone, the sun had set, twilight and mists were gathering in the valley, and the courtyard was deserted; but across the grey dusk, light was streaming through the muslin window curtains of the salon, the noise of laughter, and voices, and music came from within now, breaking the evening stillness; for everyone had gone indoors to the salon, where the gas was lighted, chairs and tables pushed out of the way, and Mademoiselle Cécile, the fat good-natured daughter of the *propriétaire*, already seated at the piano. The hall outside fills with grinning waiters and maids, who have their share of the fun as they look in through the open door. Round go the dancers, sliding and twirling on the smooth polished

floor, and Mademoiselle Cécile's fingers fly indefatigably over the keys, as she sits nodding her head to the music, and smiling as each familiar face glides past her.

Horace, who, after lingering awhile in the courtyard, had come indoors like the rest of the world, stood apart at the further end of the room, sufficiently entertained with looking on at the scene, which had the charm of novelty to his English eyes, and commenting to himself on the appearance of the dancers.

"But you do wrong not to dance, dear Monsieur, I assure you," said his Belgian friend, coming up to him at the end of a polka, with the elderly Countess, who with her dingy lilac barége gown exchanged for a dingier lilac silk, and her sandy hair fuzzier than ever, had been dancing vigorously. "Mademoiselle Cécile's music is delicious,"

he continued, "it positively inspires one; let me persuade you to attempt just one little dance."

"Indeed, I would rather look on," said Horace; "I can listen to Mademoiselle Cécile's music all the same, and I do not care much for dancing, as I told you; besides, I don't know anyone here."

"If that be all," cried the other eagerly, "I can introduce you to half a dozen partners in a moment; that lady that I have just been dancing with, for instance, will be charmed——"

"Stop, I entreat of you," said the young Englishman, in alarm, as his friend was about to rush off; "I cannot indeed—I assure you I am a very bad dancer; I am tired with my long walk too."

"Ah, that walk," said the Belgian, "I did wrong in advising you to take it; you prolonged it till you missed the *table-d'hôte* din-

ner, and now you are too much fatigued to dance."

"But I am very much amused as it is, I assure you," insisted Graham. "Do tell me something about all these people. Are they all stopping at the hotel?"

His companion was delighted to give any information in his power. No, not a third of the people were stopping at the hotel, the greater part had come over from Liége, and would go back there by the ten o'clock train.

"Then you do not know many of them?" Graham said.

"No," the Belgian admitted, "he did not know many of them; only those who were staying at Chaudfontaine. That lady he had just been dancing with, Monsieur had seen in the morning, he believed; she was the Countess G——, a most distinguished person, with blood-royal in her veins, and came

from Brussels. That pretty girl in blue was Mademoiselle Sophie L——, who was going to be married next month to one of the largest proprietors in the neighbourhood, the young man standing by her, who was paying her so much attention. The odd-looking man in shoes and buckles was a rising genius, or thought himself so, a violinist, who came over occasionally from Liége, and hoped to make his fortune some day in London or Paris; and perhaps he will do so," says the Belgian, "for he has talent. That little dirty-looking young man with a hooked nose, and the red Turkish slippers, is a Spaniard going through a course of studies at Liége; he is staying in the hotel, and so are the fat old gentleman and lady seated on the sofa; they are Brazilians, and he has been sent over by his Government to purchase arms, I believe. Those three young ladies in white are sisters, and are come

here from Antwerp for the summer; that is their mother talking to Mademoiselle Cécile. I see no one else at this moment," he added, looking slowly round the room at the groups of dancers who stood chattering and fanning themselves in the interval between the dances.

"Who is that?" asked Graham, directing his attention to a gentleman who had just appeared, and was standing, leaning in the doorway opposite.

He was a tall handsome man, with light hair, and a long fair moustache and beard, perfectly well dressed, and with an air sufficiently distinguished to make him at once conspicuous amongst the Liége clerks and shopkeepers, of whom a large part of the company consisted.

"Ah! precisely, Monsieur, you have fixed upon the most remarkable personage here," cried his companion, with some excite-

ment; "but is it possible you do not know him?"

"I never saw him before," answered Graham. "Is he a celebrity? A prince, or an ambassador, or anything of that kind?"

"No, nothing of that kind," said the other laughing, "but a celebrity nevertheless in his way. That is M. Linders, the great gambler."

"I never even heard of him," said the young Englishman; "but then I don't know much about such people."

"It is true, I had forgotten that Monsieur is not of this country; but you would hear enough about him were you to stay any time at Wiesbaden, or Homburg, or Spa, or any of those places. He twice broke the bank at Homburg last year, won two hundred thousand francs at Spa this summer, and lost them again the next week. He is a most danger-

ous fellow, and positively dreaded by the proprietors of the tables."

"What! when he loses two hundred thousand francs?"

"Ah! that is a thing that rarely happens; as a rule he is perfectly cool, which is the principal thing at these tables, plays when the run is in his favour, and stops when it is against him; but occasionally he gets excited, and then of course the chances are that he loses everything like another."

"What can he be doing here?" said Graham.

"Who knows? Stopping a night or two on his way to Paris, or Brussels, perhaps, on the chance of finding some one here rich enough and imprudent enough to make it worth his while. You do not play, Monsieur?"

"Never in that way," answered the lad,

laughing; "I can get through a game of whist decently enough, but I rarely touch cards at all."

"Ah, then you are safe: otherwise I would have said, avoid M. Linders; he has not the best reputation in the world, and he has a brother-in-law who generally travels with him, and is even a greater rogue than himself, but not so lucky—so they say at least."

"Do you know him, this famous gambler? He does not look much like one," said Graham.

"That is true; but he is a man of good birth and education, I believe, though he has turned out such a *mauvais sujet*, and it is part of his *métier* to get himself up in that style. Yes, I know him a little, from meeting him here and elsewhere; he is always going about, sometimes *en prince*, sometimes in a more humble way—but ex-

cuse me, dear Monsieur, Mademoiselle Cécile has begun to play, and I am engaged to Mademoiselle Sophie for this dance; she will never forgive me if I make her wait."

The dancers whirled on; the room grew hotter and hotter. M. Linders had disappeared, and Graham began to think that he too had had almost enough of it all, and that it would be pleasant to seek peace and coolness in the deserted moonlit courtyard. He was watching for a pause in the waltz, that would admit of his crossing the room, when his attention was attracted by the same little girl he had seen that morning in the garden. She was still dressed in the shabby old frock and pinafore, and as she came creeping in, threading her way deftly amongst the young ladies in starched muslins and gay ribbons who were fluttering about, she made the effect of a little brown

moth who had strayed into the midst of a swarm of brilliant butterflies. No one took any notice of her, and she made her way up to the large round table which had been pushed into the far corner of the room, and near which Graham was standing.

"Do you want anything?" he asked, as he saw her raise herself on tiptoe, and stretch forward over the table.

"I want *that*," she said, pointing to a miniature roulette board, which stood in the middle, beyond the reach of her small arm.

He gave it to her, and then stood watching to see what she would do with it. She set to work with great deliberation; first pulling a handful of sugar-plums out of her pocket, and arranging them in a little heap at her side on the table, and then proceeding with much gravity to stake them on the numbers. She would put down a

bonbon and give the board a twirl; "*vingt-cinq*," she would say; the ball flew round and fell into a number; it might be ten, or twenty, or twenty-five, it did not much matter; she looked to see what it was, but right or wrong, never failed to eat the bonbon—an illogical result, which contrasted quaintly with the intense seriousness with which she made her stakes. Sometimes she would place two or three sugar-plums on one number, always naming it aloud—"*trente-et-un*," "*douze-premier*," "*douze-après*." It was the oddest game for a small thing not six years old; and there was something odd, too, in her matter-of-fact, business-like air, which amused Graham. He had seen gambling-tables during his three weeks' visit to Germany, and he felt sure that this child must have seen them too.

"Eh, what an insupportable heat!" cried a harsh high-pitched voice behind them.

"Monsieur Jules, I will repose myself for a few minutes, if you will have the goodness to fetch me a glass of *eau sucrée*. *Je n'en peux plus*!"

Graham, recognizing the voice, turned round, and saw the Countess G—— leaning on the arm of a young man with whom she had been dancing.

"But it is really stifling!" she exclaimed, dropping into an arm-chair by the table as her partner retired. "Monsieur does not dance, apparently," she continued, addressing Horace. "Well, you are perhaps right; it is a delightful amusement, but on a night like this——Ah! here is little Madelon. I have not seen you before to-day. How is it you are not dancing?"

"I don't want to," answered the child, giving the roulette-board a twirl.

"But that is not at all a pretty game that you have there," said the Countess, shaking

her head; "it was not for little girls that Mademoiselle Cécile placed the roulette-board there. Where is your doll? why are you not playing with her?"

"My doll is in bed; and I like this best," answered the child indifferently. "*Encore ce malheureux trente-six! Je n'ai pas de chance ce soir!*"

"But little girls should not like what is naughty; and I think it would be much better if you were in bed too. Come, give me that ugly toy; there is Monsieur quite shocked to see you playing with it."

Madelon looked up into Horace's face with her wide-open gaze, as if to verify this wonderful assertion; and apparently satisfied that it had been made for the sake of effect, continued her game without making any reply.

"Oh, then, I really must take it away," said the Countess; "*allons*, be reasonable,

ma petite; let me have that, and go and dance with the other little boys and girls."

"But I don't want to dance, and I like to play at this," cries Madelon with her shrill little voice, clutching the board with both her small hands, as the Countess tried to get possession of it; "you have no right to take it away. Papa lets me play with it; and I don't care for you! Give it me back again, I say; *je le veux, je le veux*!"

"No, no," answered the Countess, pushing it beyond Madelon's reach to the other side of the table. "I daresay you have seen your papa play at that game; but children must not always do the same as their papas. Now, be good, and eat your bonbons like a sensible child."

"I will not eat them if I may not play for them!" cried the child; and with one sweep of her hand she sent them all off the table on to the floor, and stamped on them

again and again with her tiny foot. "You have no right to speak to me so!" she went on energetically; "no one but my papa speaks to me; and I don't know you, and I don't like you, and you are very ugly!" and then she turned her back on the Countess and stood in dignified silence.

"*Mais c'est un petit diable!*" cried the astonished lady, fanning herself vigorously with her pocket-handkerchief. She was discomfited though she had won the victory, and hailed the return of her partner with the *eau sucrée* as a relief. "A thousand thanks, M. Jules! What if we take another turn, though this room really is of an insufferable heat."

Madelon was left confronting Horace, a most ill-used little girl, not crying, but with flushed cheeks and pouting lips—a little girl who had lost her game and her bonbons, and felt at war with all the world in conse-

quence. Horace was sorry for her; he, too, thought she had been ill-used, and no sooner was the Countess fairly off than he said, very immorally, no doubt,

"Would you like to have your game back again?"

"No," said Madelon, in whom this speech roused a fresh sense of injury; "I have no more bonbons."

Graham had none to offer her, and a silence ensued, during which she stood leaning against the table, slowly scraping one foot backwards and forwards over the remains of the scattered bonbons. At last he bethought him of a small bunch of charms that he had got somewhere, and hung to his watch-chain, and with which he had often enticed and won the hearts of children.

"Would you like to come and look at these?" he said, holding them up.

"No," she replied, ungraciously, and retreating a step backwards.

"Not at this?" he said. "Here is a little steam engine that runs on wheels; and, see, here is a fan that will open and shut."

"No," she said again, with a determined little shake of her head, and still retreating.

"But only look at this," he said, selecting a little flexible enamel fish, and trying to lure back this small wild bird. "See this little gold and green fish, it moves its head and tail."

"No," she said once more, but the fish was evidently a temptation, and she paused irresolute for a moment; but Graham made a step forward, and this decided her.

"I don't care for *breloques*," she said, with disdain, "and I don't want to see them, I tell you." And then, turning round, she marched straight out of the room.

At that moment the music stopped, the waltzing ceased, and a line of retreat was left open for Graham. He saw the Countess once more approaching, and availed himself of it; out of the noise and heat and crowd he fled, into the fresh open air of the quiet courtyard.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE COURTYARD.

THREE gentlemen with cigars, sitting on the bench under the salon windows, two more pacing up and down in the moonlight before the hall-door, and a sixth apparently asleep in a shadowy corner, were the only occupants of the courtyard. Graham passed them by, and sought solitude at the lower end, where he found a seat on the stone coping of the iron railing. The peace and coolness and silence were refreshing, after the heat and clamour of the salon: the broad harvest-moon had risen

above the opposite ridge of hills, and flooded everything with clear light, the river gleamed and sparkled, the poplars threw long still shadows across the white road; now and then the leaves rustled faintly, some far-off voice echoed back from the hills, and presently from the hotel the sound of the music, and the measured beat of feet, came softened to the ear, mingled with the low rush of the stream, and the ceaseless ringing of the hammers in the village forges.

Horace had not sat there above ten minutes, and was debating whether—his Belgian friend notwithstanding—a stroll along the river-bank would not be a pleasanter termination to his evening than a return to the dancing, when he saw a small figure appear in the hall doorway, stand a moment as if irresolute, and then come slowly across the courtyard towards him. As she came near he recognized little Madelon. She paused

when she was within a yard or two of him, and stood contemplating him with her hands clasped behind her back.

"So you have come out too," he said.

"*Mais oui—tout ce tapage m'agace les nerfs*," answered the child, pushing her hair off her forehead with one of her old-fashioned little gestures, and then standing motionless as before, her hands behind her, and her eyes fixed on Graham. Somehow he felt strangely attracted by this odd little child, with her quaint vehement ways and speeches, who stood gazing at him with a look half *farouche*, half confiding, in her great brown eyes.

"Monsieur," she began, at last.

"Well," said Graham.

"Monsieur, I *would* like to see the little green fish. May I look at it?"

"To be sure," he answered. "Come here, and I will show it to you."

"And, Monsieur, I do like *breloques* very much," continues Madelon, feeling that this is a moment for confession.

"Very well, then, you can look at all these. See, here is the little fish to begin with."

"And may I have it in my own hand to look at?" she asked, willing to come to some terms before capitulating.

"Yes, you shall have it to hold in your own hand, if you will come here."

She came close to him then, unclasping her hands, and holding out a tiny palm to receive the little trinket.

Horace was engaged in unfastening it from the rest of the bunch, and whilst doing so he said,

"Will you not tell me your name? Madelon, is it not?"

"My name is Madeleine, but papa and every one call me Madelon."

"Madeleine what?"

"Madeleine Linders."

"Linders!" cried Horace, suddenly enlightened; "what, is M. Linders—" the famous gambler he had nearly said, but checked himself—" is that tall gentleman with a beard, whom I saw in the salon just now, your papa?"

"Yes, that is my papa. Please may I have that now?"

He put the little flexible toy into her hand, and she stood gazing at it for a moment, almost afraid to touch it, and then pushing it gently backwards and forwards with one finger.

"It does move!" she cried delighted. "I never saw one like it before."

"Would you like to keep it?" asked Graham.

"Always, do you mean?—for my very own?"

"Yes, always."

"Ah, yes!" she cried, "I should like it very much. I will wear it round my neck with a string, and love it so much,—better than Sophie."

She looked at it with great admiration as it glittered in the moonlight; but her next question fairly took Horace aback.

"Is it worth a great deal of money, Monsieur?" she inquired.

"Why, no, not a great deal—very little, in fact," he replied.

"Ah! then, I will beg papa to let me keep it always, always, and not to take it away."

"I daresay he will let you keep it, if you tell him you like it," said Graham, not clearly understanding her meaning.

"Oh! yes, but then he often gives me pretty things, and then sometimes he says he must take them away again, because

they are worth so much money. I don't mind, you know, if he wants them; but I will ask him to let me keep this."

"And what becomes of all your pretty things?"

"I don't know; I have none now," she answered, "we left them behind at Spa. Do you know one reason why I would not dance to-night?" she added, lowering her voice confidentially.

"No; what was it?"

"Because I had not my blue silk frock with lace, that I wear at the balls at Wiesbaden and Spa. I can dance, you know, papa taught me; but not in this old frock, and I left my other at Spa."

"And what were your other reasons?" asked Graham, wondering more and more at the small specimen of humanity before him.

"Oh! because the room here is so small and crowded. At Wiesbaden there are rooms large—so large—quite like this courtyard," extending her small arms by way of giving expression to her vague sense of grandeur; "and looking-glasses all round, and crimson sofas, and gold chandeliers, and ladies in such beautiful dresses, and officers who danced with me. I don't know any one here."

"And who were the Count and the Prince you were talking about to Mademoiselle Sophie in the garden this morning?"

Madelon looked disconcerted.

"I shan't tell you," she said, hanging down her head.

"Will you not? Not if I want to know very much?"

She hesitated a moment, and then burst forth—

"Well, then, they were just nobody at

all. I was only talking make-believe to Sophie, that she might do the steps properly."

"Oh! then, you did not expect to see them here this evening?"

"Here!" cries Madelon, with much contempt; "why, no. One meets nothing but *bourgeois* here."

Graham was infinitely amused.

"Am I *bourgeois?*" he said, laughing.

"I don't know," she replied, looking at him; "but you are not a milord, I know, for I heard papa asking Mademoiselle Cécile about you, and she said you were not a milord at all."

"So you care for nothing but Counts and Princes?"

"I don't know," she said again. Then with an evident sense that such abstract propositions would involve her beyond her

depth, she added, "Have you any other pretty things to show me? I should like to see what else you have on your chain."

In five minutes more they were fast friends, and Madelon, seated on Graham's knee, was chattering away, and recounting to him all the history of her short life. He was not long in perceiving that her father was the beginning and end of all her ideas —her one standard of perfection, the one medium through which, small as she was, she was learning to look out on and estimate the world, and receiving her first impressions of life. She had no mother, she said, in answer to Graham's inquiries. *Maman* had died when she was quite a little baby; and though she seemed to have some dim faint recollection of having once lived in a cottage in the country, with a woman

to take care of her, everything else referred to her father, from her first, vague floating memories to the time when she could date them as distinct and well-defined facts. She had once had a nurse, she said —a long time ago that was, when she was little—but papa did not like her, and so she went away; and now she was too big for one. Papa did everything for her, it appeared, from putting her to sleep at night, when Mademoiselle was disposed to be wakeful, to nursing her when she was ill, taking her to fêtes on grand holidays, buying her pretty things, walking with her, teaching her dancing, and singing, and reading; and she loved him so much—ah! so much! Indeed, in all the world, the child had but one object for a child's boundless powers of trust and love and veneration, and that one was her father.

"And where do you generally live now?" asked Graham.

"Why, nowhere in particular," Madelon answered. "Of course not—they were always travelling about. Papa had to go to a great many places. They had come last from Spa, and before that they had been at Wiesbaden and Homburg, and last winter they had spent at Nice; and now they were on their way to Paris."

"And do you and your papa always live alone? Have you not an uncle?" enquired Graham, remembering the Belgian's speech about the brother-in-law.

"Oh! yes, there is Uncle Charles—he comes with us generally; but sometimes he goes away, and then I am so glad."

"How is that? are you not fond of him?"

"No," said Madelon, "I don't like him at all; he is very disagreeable, and teases me. And he is always wanting me to go

away; he says, 'Adolphe'—that is papa, you know—'when is that child going to school?' But papa pays no attention to him, for he is never going to send me away; he told me so, and he says he could not get on without me at all."

Graham no longer wondered at Madelon's choice of a game, for it appeared she was in the habit of accompanying her father every evening to the gambling tables, when they were at any of the watering-places he frequented.

"Sometimes we go away into the ball-room and dance," she said, "that is when papa is losing; he says, 'Madelon, *mon enfant*, I see we shall do nothing here to-night, let us go and dance.' But sometimes he does nothing but win, and then we stop till the table closes, and he makes a great deal of money. Do you ever make money in that way, Monsieur?" she added naïvely.

"Indeed I do not," replied Graham.

"It is true that everyone has not the same way," said the child, with an air of being well informed, and evidently regarding her father's way as a profession like another, only superior to most. "What do you do, Monsieur?"

"I am going to be a doctor, Madelon."

"A doctor," she said reflecting; "I do not think that can be a good way. I only know one doctor, who cured me when I was ill last winter; but I know a great many gentlemen who make money like papa. Can you make a fortune with ten francs, Monsieur?"

"I don't think I ever tried," answered Horace.

"Ah well, papa can; I have often heard him say, 'Give me only ten francs, *et je ferai fortune*!'"

There was something at once so droll

and so sad about this child, with her precocious knowledge and ignorant simplicity, that the lad's honest tender heart was touched with a sudden pity as he listened to her artless chatter. He was almost glad when her confidences drifted away to more childlike subjects of interest, and she told him about her toys, and books, and pictures, and songs; she could sing a great many songs, she said, but Horace could not persuade her to let him hear one.

"Why do you talk French?" she said presently; "you speak it so funnily. I can talk English."

"Can you?" said Horace laughing, for indeed he spoke French with a fine English accent and idiom. "Let me hear you. Where did you learn it?"

"Uncle Charles taught me; he is English," she answered, speaking correctly enough, with a pretty little accent.

"Indeed!" cried Graham. "Your mother was English, then?"

"Yes. Mamma came from England, papa says, and Uncle Charles almost always talks English to me. I would not let him do it, only papa wished me to learn."

"And have you any other relations in England?"

"I don't know," she answered. "We have never been in England, and papa says he will never go, for he detests the English; but I only know Uncle Charles and you, and I like you."

"What is your Uncle Charles' other name? Can you tell me?"

"Leroy," she answered promptly.

"But that is not an English name," said Graham.

This was a little beyond Madelon, but after some consideration, she said with much simplicity,

"I don't know whether it is not English. But it is only lately his name has been Leroy, since he came back from a journey he made; before that it was something else, I forget what, but I heard him tell papa he would like to be called Leroy, as it was a common name; and papa told me, in case anyone asked me."

"I understand," said Graham; and indeed he did understand, and felt a growing compassion for the poor little girl, whose only companions and protectors were a gambler and a sharper.

They were still talking, when the silence of the courtyard was broken by a sudden confusion and bustle. The sound of the music and dancing had already ceased; and now a medley of voices, a shrill clamour of talking and calling, made themselves heard through the open hall door.

"Henri! Henri! ou est-il donc, ce petit drôle?"

"Allons, Pauline, dépêche toi, mon enfant, ton père nous attends!"

"Ciel! j'ai perdu mon fichu et mes gants."

"Enfin."

"The people are going away," says Madelon; and, in fact, in another minute the whole party, talking, laughing, hurrying, came streaming out by twos and threes into the moonlight, and, crossing the road and bridge, disappeared one by one in the station beyond, the sound of their voices still echoing back through the quiet night. The last had hardly vanished when a tall solitary figure appeared in the courtyard, and advanced, looking round as if searching for some one.

"Madelon!" cried the same voice that Graham had heard that morning in the garden.

"There is papa looking for me; I must go," exclaimed the child at the same moment; and before Graham had time to speak, she had slipped off his knee and darted up to her father; then taking his hand, the two went off together, the small figure jumping and dancing by the side of the tall man as they disappeared within the doorway of the hotel.

A few minutes more, and then a sound as of distant thunder told that the train was approaching through the tunnel. Graham watched it emerge, traverse the clear moonlit valley with slackening speed, and pause at the station for its freight of passengers. There was a vague sound of confusion as the people took their places, and then with a parting shriek it set off again; and as the sound died away in the distance, a great stillness succeeded the noise and bustle of a few moments before.

Horace was afraid he had seen the last of Madelon, for returning to the hotel he found no one in the salon, with the exception of Mademoiselle Cécile, who was already putting out the lights. The hall, too, was deserted; the servants had vanished, and the *habitués* of the hotel had apparently gone to bed, for he met no one as he passed along, and turned down the passage leading to the salle-à-manger. This was a large long room, occupying the whole ground floor of one wing of the hotel, with windows looking out on one side into the courtyard, on the other into the garden, two long tables, smaller ones in the space between, and above them a row of chandeliers smothered in pink and yellow paper roses. The room looked bare and deserted enough now; a sleepy waiter lounged at the further end, the trees in the garden rustled and waved to and fro in the rising night breeze, the moonlight

streamed through the uncurtained windows on to the boarded floor and white table-cloths, chasing the darkness into remote corners, and contending with the light of the single lamp which stood on one of the smaller tables, where two men were sitting, drinking, smoking, and playing at cards.

One of them was a man between thirty and forty, in a tight fitting black coat buttoned up to his chin, and with a thin face, smooth shaven, with the exception of a little yellow moustache, and sharp grey eyes. He would have been handsome, had it not been for his unpleasant expression, at once knowing and suspicious. The other Horace immediately recognised as Monsieur Linders; and a moment afterwards he perceived little Madeleine, sitting nestled close up to her father's side. The lamplight shone on her curly head and innocent *mignonne* face as she watched the game with eager eyes; it

was piquet, and she was marking for her father, and when he had a higher score than his opponent, she laughed and clapped her hands with delight.

Graham stood watching this little scene for a minute; and somehow, as he looked at the little motherless girl, there came the thought of small rosy children he knew far away in England, who, having said their prayers, and repeated their Sunday hymns, perhaps, had been tucked into little white beds, and been fast asleep hours ago; and a kind, foolish notion entered the young fellow's head, that, for that one evening at least, he must get the brown-eyed child, who had taken his fancy so much, away from the drinking, and smoking, and card-playing, into a purer atmosphere. He went up to the table, and leant over her chair.

"Will you come out again and have a walk with me in the garden?" he said in English.

The man opposite, who was dealing, looked up sharply and suspiciously. Madelon turned round, and gazed up into the kind face smiling down on her, then shook her head with great decision.

"Not a little walk? I will tell you such pretty stories, all about fairies, and moonlight, and little boys and girls, and dragons," said Horace, drawing largely on his imagination, in his desire to offer a sufficient inducement.

"No," said Madelon, "I can't come; I am marking for papa."

"What is it?" said M. Linders, who understood very little English; "what does this gentleman want, *mon enfant?*"

"I was asking your little girl if she would take a walk with me in the garden," says Horace, getting rather red, and in his bad French.

"Monsieur is too good," answers M. Linders, making a grand bow, whilst his companion, having finished dealing, sat puffing away at his cigar, and drumming impatiently with his fingers on the table; "but the hour is rather late; what do you say, Madelon? Will you go with Monsieur?"

"No, papa," says the child, "I am marking for you; I don't want to go away."

"You see how it is, Monsieur," said M. Linders, turning to Graham with a smile and a shrug. "This little one thinks herself of so much importance, that she will not leave me."

"Are you then mad," cried his companion, "that you think of letting Madelon go out at this time of night? It is nearly eleven o'clock, and she can hardly keep her eyes open."

"My eyes are wide, wide open, Uncle Charles," exclaimed Madelon, indignantly;

"I'm not a bit tired, but I don't want to go out now."

"Monsieur will perhaps join our party," said Monsieur Linders, very politely. "I should be delighted to try my luck with a fresh adversary."

"Thank you," said Graham, "but I hardly ever touch cards." Then turning to Madelon, he added, "I must go away now, since you will not come for a walk. Won't you wish me good-bye? I shall not be here to-morrow."

She turned round and put her little hand into his for a moment; then with a sudden shy caprice snatched it away, and hid her face on her father's shoulder, just peeping at him with her bright eyes. But she started up again suddenly as he was leaving the room, calling out, "*Adieu, Monsieur, bon voyage,*" and kissing her hand to him. He smiled and nodded in return, bowed to M.

Linders, and so went away. There was a moment's silence after he went, and then, "You have made a fine acquaintance this evening, Madelon," said her uncle.

Madelon made a little *moue*, but did not answer.

"Are you then mad, Adolphe," he said again, "that you permit Madeleine to pick up an acquaintance with anyone who chooses to speak to her? An Englishman too!"

"Papa is not mad," cried Madelon, between whom and her uncle there was apparently a standing skirmish. "He was a very kind gentleman, and I like him very much; he gave me this little goldfish, and I shall keep it always, always," and she kissed it with effusion.

"Bah!" said M. Linders, "English or French, it is all one to me; and what harm could he do to the little one? It was an accident, but it does not matter for once.

Come, Madelon, you have forgotten to mark."

"It is your turn to deal next, papa," said the child, "may I do it for you?"

Horace Graham left Chaudfontaine by the earliest train the following morning; and of all the people he had seen on that Sunday evening at the hotel, only two ever crossed his path again in after years—M. Linders, and his little daughter, Madeleine.

CHAPTER IV.

RETROSPECT.

M. LINDERS was of both Belgian and French extraction, his father having been a native of Liége, his mother a Parisian of good family, who, in a moment of misplaced sentiment, as she was wont in after years to sigh, had consented to marry a handsome young Belgian officer, and had expiated her folly by spending the greater part of her married life at Malines, where her husband was stationed, and at Liége, where his mother and sister resided. Adolphe's education, however, was wholly

French; for Madame Linders, who, during her husband's life, had not ceased to mourn over her exile from her own city, lost no time, after his death, in returning to Paris with her two children, Thérèse, a girl of about twelve, and Adolphe, then a child five or six years old.

Madame Linders had money, but not much, and she made it go further than did ever Frenchwoman before, which is saying a great deal. Adolphe must be educated, Adolphe must be clothed, Adolphe was to be a great man some day; he was to go into the army, make himself a name, become a General, a Marshal,—heaven knows what glories the mother did not dream for him, as she turned and twisted her old black silks, in the *entresol* in the Chaussée d'Antin, where she had her little apartment. She had friends in Paris, and must keep up appearances for Adolphe's sake, not to mention her own,

and so could not possibly live in a cheap out-of-the-way quarter.

As for Thérèse, she was of infinitely small account in the family. She was plain, not too amiable, nor particularly clever, and inclined to be *dévote*; and, as in spite of positive and negative failings, she also had to eat and be clothed as well as her handsome fair brother, she could be regarded as nothing else than a burden in the economical household.

"You ask me what I shall do with Thérèse?" said Madame Linders one day to a confidential friend. "Oh! she will go into a convent, of course. I know of an excellent one near Liége, of which her aunt is the superior, and where she will be perfectly happy. She has a turn that way. What else can I do with her, my dear? To speak frankly, she is *laide à faire peur*, and she can have no *dot* worth mentioning, for

I have not a sou to spare; so there is no chance of her marrying."

Thérèse knew her fate, and was resigned to it. As her mother said, she had a turn that way; and to the Liége convent she according went, but not before Madame Linders' death, which took place when her daughter was about seven-and-twenty, and which was, as Thérèse vehemently averred, occasioned by grief at her son's conduct.

Adolphe had also known the fate reserved for him, and was by no means resigned to it; for he had never had the least intention of becoming a soldier, and having escaped conscription, absolutely refused to enter the army. He was a clever, unprincipled lad, who had done well at his studies, but lost no time in getting into the most dissipated society he could find from the moment he left college. He inherited his father's good looks, but his mother's predilections apparently; for he

he set out in life with the determination to be Parisian amongst Parisians—of a certain class, be it understood; and having some talent for drawing, as indeed he had for most things, he used it as a pretext, announced that he intended to be an artist, and furnishing a room in the Quartier Latin, with an easel and a pipe, he began the wild Bohemian life which he found most in accordance with his tastes.

He was selfish and reckless enough, but not altogether heartless, for he had a real affection for his mother, which might have been worked upon with advantage. But Madame Linders, who had indulged him till he had learnt to look upon her devotion as a thing of course, now turned upon him with the fretful, inconsequent reproaches of a weak mind; and finding that he was constantly met with tearful words and aggrieved

looks, her son avoided her as much as possible. His sister he could not endure. Thérèse had always been jealous of the marked preference shown for him; and now, with an evident sense of triumph, she preached little sermons, talked at him with unceasing perseverance, and in truth was not a very engaging person.

Madame Linders had not been dead ten days, when the brother and sister had a violent quarrel, and parted with the determination on either side never to meet again—a resolution which was perfectly well kept. Thérèse retired to the Belgian convent, and Adolphe, the possessor of a few thousand francs, the remains of his mother's small fortune, returned to his studio and to the life he had chosen.

The success and duration of a career of this sort is in exact proportion to the amount

of capital, real or assumed, invested in it. Monsieur Linders' capital was very small; his francs and credit both were soon exhausted, and he began to find that making-believe to paint pictures was hardly a paying business. He tried to take portraits, attempted etching, gambled, and, finally, being more in debt than he could well afford, disappeared from the Paris world for a number of years, and for a long space was known and heard of no more. It was indeed affirmed in his circle of acquaintance that he had been seen playing a fiddle at one of the cheap theatres; that he had been recognized in the dress of a fiacre-driver, and in that of a waiter at a Café Chantant: but these reports were idly spread, and wanted confirmation. They might or might not have been true. M. Linders never cared to talk much of those seven or eight years in which he had effaced himself, as it were, from society; but

it may be imagined that he went through some strange experiences in a life which was a struggle for bare existence. Respectable ways of gaining a livelihood he ever held in aversion; and it was not, therefore, to be expected that a foolish and unprofitable pride would interfere to prevent his using any means not absolutely criminal in order to reach any desired end.

At length, however, he emerged from obscurity, and rose once more to the surface of society; and one of his old acquaintance, who encountered him at Homburg, returned marvelling to Paris to relate that he had seen Adolphe Linders winning fabulous sums at *trente-et-quarante*, that he was decently clothed, had a magnificent suite of apartments at one of the first hotels, and an English wife of wondrous beauty. Monsieur Linders had, in fact, sown his wild oats, so to speak, and settled down to the business of his life.

In former days, gambling had been a passion with him—too much so, indeed, to admit of his playing with any great success; he had been apt to lose both temper and skill. Time, however, while increasing this passion for play, till it gradually became a necessity of his life, had taught him to bring to bear upon it all the ability which would have eminently fitted him for some more praiseworthy employment. Formerly he had indulged in it as a diversion; now it became a serious business, which he prosecuted with a cool head, determined will, and unfailing perseverance—qualities for which few would have given him credit in the wild unsettled period of his early career. The result was highly satisfactory to himself; he was soon known as one of the most successful haunters of the German and Belgian gaming-tables; he cast off the outward aspect and manners of the Bohemian set he

had once affected, and assumed the guise and dress of the gentleman he really was—at least by birth and education—and which he found at once more profitable and more congenial to his maturer tastes. He lived splendidly, and spent money freely when he had it; incurred debts with great facility when he had not—debts which he did or did not pay, as the case might be.

It was during a winter spent in Brussels that he made the acquaintance of Charles Moore, a young Englishman with tastes identical with his own, but inferior to him in ability, talents, and even in principles. A sort of partnership was formed between them, Mr. Linders undertaking most of the work, and the Englishman contributing his small fortune as capital; and not only his own, but that of his sister Magdalen, a young girl who had come abroad with her brother, the only near relation she had in the world.

M. Linders had been introduced to her, and she, in complete ignorance of the real character of either him or her brother Charles, had, with all the simplicity of eighteen, straightway fallen in love with the handsome gentlemanlike man, who, on his side, made no secret of the impresson produced on him by the great loveliness of the English girl. Moore, who was a thoroughly heartless scamp, had not the least compunction in agreeing to a marriage between his sister and this man, with whose character and mode of life he was perfectly well acquainted; indeed, it suited his views so well, that he did what lay in his power to forward it. There were no difficulties in the way; the two were almost alone in the world. He had been left her sole guardian by their old father, who had died a twelvemonth before; and she, trusting her brother entirely, was glad to leave everything in his

hands. The marriage was accomplished with all possible speed, and it was not till nearly two months later that an accident revealed to Magdalen Linders, what indeed in any case she must have discovered before long—what manner of man this was she had got for her husband.

Then she did not pine away, nor sicken with despair, being of a great courage, strong to bear evil and misfortune, and not made of the stuff that gives way under cruel deception and disappointment. She uttered only one reproach—

"You should have told me of all this, Adolphe," she said.

"You would not have married me," he answered gloomily.

"I—I do not know. Ah, I loved you so much, and so truly!"

And she did love him still; and clung to him to the last, but not the less was she

broken-hearted, so far as any enjoyment of life was concerned; and her husband saw it. All sense of rejoicing seemed to die out of her heart for ever. She hated the splendour with which he sometimes surrounded her, even more than the paltry shifts and expedients to which at other times they had to resort, when he had spent all his money, and there was no more forthcoming for the moment; she wept when her children were born, thinking of the iniquity of the world they had entered; and when her two little boys died one after the other, there was almost a sense of relief mixed with the bitterness of her sorrow, as she reflected on the father she could not have taught them to respect, and on the abject evil and misery from which she could not have shielded them.

As for M. Linders, he at once adored and neglected his wife, as was the nature of

the man; that is, he adored her theoretically for her rare beauty, but neglected her practically, when, after a few months of married life, he saw her bloom fading, and her animation vanish, in the utter despondency which had seized her, and which found its outward expression in a certain studied composure and coldness of manner. There soon came a time when he would have willingly freed himself altogether from the constraint of her presence. He travelled almost incessantly, spending the summer and autumn at the German watering-places; the winter in France, or Belgium, or Italy; and he would sometimes propose that she should remain at a Paris hotel till he could return to her. In the first years after their marriage she objected vehemently. She was so young, so unused to solitude, that she felt a certain terror at the prospect of being left alone; and, moreover, she still

clung with a sort of desperation to her girlish illusions, and, loving her husband, could not cease to believe in his love for her. She had plans, too, for reforming him, and for a long time would not allow herself to be convinced of their utter vanity and hopelessness. After the death of her little boys, however, she became more indifferent, or more resigned. And so it came to pass that when she had been married about six years, and four months after her third child was born, Madame Linders died, alone at a Paris hotel, with no one near her but the doctor, her baby's nurse, and the woman of the house. She had dictated a few words to tell her husband, who was then in Germany, that she was dying; and, stricken with a horrible remorse, he had travelled with all possible haste to Paris, and arrived at daybreak one morning to find that his wife had died the evening before.

Madame Linders' death had been caused by a fever, under which she had sunk rapidly at last. There had been no question of heart-breaking or pining grief here—so her husband thought with a sort of satisfaction even then, as he remembered his sister's words of bitter reproach over their mother's death-bed; and yet not the less, as he looked at his dead wife's face, did the reflection force itself upon him, that he had made the misery instead of the happiness of her life. He was a man who had accustomed himself to view things from the hardest and most practical point of view; and from such a view his marriage had been rather a failure than otherwise, since the memory of the little fortune she had brought with her had vanished with the fortune itself. But it had not been altogether for money that he had married her; he had been in love with her at one time, and that time repeated itself,

with a pertinacity not to be shaken off, as he stood now in her silent presence.

Whatever his feelings may have been, however, they found no expression then. He turned sharply on the women standing round, who had already, after the fashion of womankind, contrived, without speaking, to let him know their opinion of a man who had left his wife alone for six months at an hotel, whilst he went and amused himself. He scarcely glanced at the small daughter, now presented to him for the first time; and he bade Madame Lavaux, the mistress of the hotel, "make haste and finish with all that," when, with tearful voice, and discursive minuteness, she related to him the history of his wife's last days. He made all necessary arrangements; took possession of Madame Linders' watch and few trinkets; himself superintended the packing of her clothes and other trifling

properties into a large trunk, which he left in Madame Lavaux' charge; attended the funeral on the following day; and immediately on his return from it, ordered a fiacre to be in readiness to convey him to the railway station, as he was going to quit Paris immediately. He was on the point of departure, when he was confronted by Madame Lavaux and the nurse bearing the infant, who begged to know if he had any directions to leave concerning his child.

"Madame," he answered, addressing the landlady, "I entrust all these matters to you; see that the child is properly provided for, and I will send the requisite money."

"We had arranged that her nurse should take her away to her own home in the country," said Madame Lavaux.

"That will do," he answered; and was

about to leave the room, when the nurse, an honest country-woman, interposed once more, to inquire where she should write to Monsieur to give him tidings of his little daughter.

"I want none," he replied. "You can apply here to Madame for money if the child lives; if it dies she will let me know, and I need send no more." And so saying, he strode out of the room, leaving the women with hands and eyes uplifted at the hard-hearted conduct of the father.

For nearly two years M. Linders was absent from Paris, wandering about, as his habit was, from one town to another, a free man, as he would himself have expressed it, except for the one tie which he acknowledged only in the sums of money he sent from time to time, with sufficient liberality, to Madame Lavaux. No news reached him of his child, and he demanded none.

But about twenty months after his wife's death, business obliged him to go for a few weeks to Paris; and finding himself with a leisure day on his hands, it occurred to him, with a sudden impulse, to spend it in the country and go and see his little girl. He ascertained from Madame Lavaux where she was, and went.

The woman with whom little Madeleine had been placed lived about fifteen miles from Paris, in a small village perched half-way up a steep hill, from the foot of which stretched a wide plain, where the Seine wound slowly amongst trees and meadows and scattered villages. The house to which M. Linders was directed stood a little apart from the others, near the road-side, but separated from it by a strip of garden, planted with herbs and a patch of vines; and as he opened the gate, he came at once upon a pretty little picture of a child of two

years, in a quaint, short-waisted, long-skirted pinafore, toddling about, playing at hide-and-seek among the tall poles and trailing tendrils, and kept within safe limits by a pair of leading-strings passed round the arm of a woman who sat in the shade of the doorway knitting. As M. Linders came up the narrow pathway she ran towards him to the utmost extent of her tether, uttering little joyous inarticulate cries, and bubbling over with the happy instinctive laughter of a child whose consciousness is bounded by its glad surroundings.

When, in moments of pseudo remorse, which would come upon him from time to time, it occurred to M. Linders to reflect upon his misdeeds, and adopt an apologetic tone concerning them, he was wont to propound a singular theory respecting his life, averring, in general terms, that it had been spoilt by women,—a speech more epigram-

matic, perhaps, than accurate, since of the two women who had loved him best, his mother and his wife, he had broken the heart of the one, and ruined the happiness of the other. And yet it was not without its grain of meaning, however false and distorted; for M. Linders, who was not more consistent than the rest of mankind, had, by some queer anomaly, along with all his hardness, and recklessness, and selfishness, a capacity for affection after his own fashion, and an odd sensitiveness to the praise and blame of those women whom he cared for and respected which did not originate merely in vanity and love of applause. He had been fond of his mother, though he had ignored her wishes and abused her generosity; and he had hated his sister Thérèse, because he imagined that she had come between them. Their reproaches had been unbearable to him, and though his wife

had never blamed him in words, there had been a mute upbraiding in her mournful looks and dejected spirits, which he had resented as a wrong done to the love he had once felt for her. In the absence of many subjects for self-congratulation, he rather piqued himself on a warm heart and sensitive feelings, and chose to consider them ill-requited by the cold words and sad glances of those whose happiness he was destroying. The idea that he should set matters straight by adjusting his life to meet their preconceived notions of right and wrong, would have appeared to him highly absurd; but he considered them unreasonable and himself ill-used when they refused to give their approbation to his proceedings, and this idea of ill-usage and unreasonableness he was willing to encourage, as it enabled him to shift the responsibility of their unhappiness from his own shoulders on to theirs, and to deaden the sense of re-

morse which would make itself felt from time to time. For in the worst of men, they say, there still lingers some touch of kindly human feeling, and M. Linders, though amongst the most worthless, was not perhaps absolutely the worst of men. He was selfish enough to inflict any amount of pain, yet not hardened enough to look unmoved on his victims. He had, in truth, taken both their misery and their reproaches to heart; and sometimes, especially since his wife's death, he had surprised in himself a strange, unaccountable desire for a love that should be true and pure, but which, ignorant of, or ignoring his errors, should be content to care for him and believe in him just as he was: such a love as his wife might, perhaps, have given him in her single month of unconscious happiness. It was a longing fitful, and not defined in words, but a real sentiment all the same, not a sentimentality; and,

imperfect as it was in scope and tendency, it expressed the best part of the man's nature. He despised it, and crushed it down; but it lay latent, ready to be kindled by a touch.

And here was a small piece of womankind belonging to him, who could upbraid by neither word nor look, who ran towards him confidently, stretching out tiny hands to clutch at his shining gold chain, and gazing up in his face with great brown eyes, that recalled to him those of her dead mother, when she had first known and learnt to love him. Had Madelon been a shy, plain child—had she hidden her face, and run from him screaming to her nurse, as children are so wont to do, he would then and there have paid the money he had brought with him as the ostensible cause of his visit, and gone on his way, thinking no more about her for another two years perhaps. But Madelon had no

thought of shyness with the tall fair handsome man who had taken her fancy; she stood for a moment in the pathway before him, balancing herself on tiptoe with uplifted arms, confident in the hope of being taken up; and, as the woman recognizing M. Linders, came forward and bade the child run to Papa, with a sudden unaccustomed emotion of tenderness, almost pathetic in such a man, he stooped down and raised her in his arms.

As he travelled back to Paris that day, M. Linders formed a plan which he lost no time in carrying, partially, at least, into execution. During the next twelvemonth he spent much of his time in Paris, and went frequently to see his small daughter, never without some gift to win her heart, till the child came to regard his pocket as the inexhaustible source of boundless surprises, in the shape of toys and cakes and bonbons. It

was not long before she was devoted to her father, and, her nurse dying when she was a little more than three years old, M. Linders resolved at once to carry out his idea, and, instead of placing her with any one else, take possession of her himself. He removed her accordingly from the country to Paris, engaged a *bonne*, and henceforth Madelon accompanied him wherever he went.

CHAPTER V.

MONSIEUR LINDERS' SYSTEM.

MY little lady had given Horace Graham a tolerably correct impression of her life as they had talked together in the moonlight at Chaudfontaine. When M. Linders took her home with him—if that may be called home which consisted of wanderings from one hotel to another—it was with certain fixed ideas concerning her, which he began by realizing with the success that not unfrequently attended his ideas when he set himself with a will to work them out. His child's love and trust he had

already gained, as she had won suddenly for herself a place in his heart, and he started with the determination that these relations between them should never be disturbed. She should be educated for himself; she should be brought up to see with his eyes, to adopt his views; she should be taught no troublesome standard of right and wrong by which to measure him and find wanting; no cold shadow of doubt and reproach should ever rise between them and force them asunder; and above all, he would make her happy—she for one should never turn on him and say, "See, my life is ruined, and it is you who have done it!" She should know no life, no aims, no wishes but his; but that life should be so free from care and sorrow that for once he would be able to congratulate himself on having made the happiness, instead of the misery, of some

one whom he loved and who loved him.

These were the ideas that M. Linders entertained concerning Madelon, expressing them to himself in thoughts and language half genuine, half sentimental, as was his nature. But his love for his child was genuine enough; and for the fulfilment of his purpose he was willing to sacrifice much, devoting himself to her, and giving up time, comfort, and even money, for the sake of this one small being whom in all the world he loved, and who was to be taught to love him. He took her about with him; she associated with his companions; he familiarized her with all his proceedings, and she came in consequence to look upon their mode of life as being as much a matter of course, and a part of the great system of things, as the child does who sees her father go out to plough every day, or mount the pulpit every

Sunday to preach his sermon. Of course she did not understand it all; it was his one object in life that she should not; and fondly as he loved his little Madelon, he did not scruple to make her welfare subordinate to his own views. He was careful to keep her within the shady bounds of that world of no doubtful character, which he found wherever he went, hovering on the borders of the world of avowed honesty and respectability, jealously guarding her from every counter-influence, however good or beneficial. He would not send her to school, was half unwilling, indeed, that she should be educated in any way, lest she should come to the knowledge of good and evil, which he so carefully hid from her; and he even dismissed her good, kind-hearted *bonne*, on overhearing her instruct the child, who could then hardly speak

plain, in some little hymn or prayer, or pious story, such as nurses delight in teaching their charges. After that he took care of her himself with the assistance of friendly landladies at the hotels he frequented, who all took an interest in and were kind to the little motherless girl, but were too busy to have any time to spend in teaching her, or enlarging her ideas ; and indeed all the world conspired to carry out M. Linders' plan; for who would have cared, even had it been possible, to undertake the ungracious task of opening the eyes of a child to the real character of a father whom she loved and believed in so implicitly? And she was so happy, too! Setting aside any possible injury he might be doing her, M. Linders was the most devoted of fathers, loving and caring for her most tenderly, and thinking himself well repaid by the

clinging grasp of her small hand, by the spring of joy with which she welcomed him after any absence, by her gleeful voice and laughter, her perfect trust and confidence in him.

There must have been something good and true about this man, roué and gambler though he was, that, somehow, he himself and those around him had missed hitherto, but that sprang willingly into life when appealed to by the innocent faith, the undoubting love of his little child. Thus much Madelon all unconsciously accomplished, but more than this she could not do. M. Linders did not become a reformed character for her sake; he had never had any particular principles, and Madelon's loving innocence, which aroused all his best emotions, had no power to stir in him any noble motives or high aspirations, which, if they existed at

all, were buried too deep to be awakened by the touch of her small hand. His misdeeds had never occasioned him much uneasiness, except as they had affected the conduct of others towards himself; and he had no reproaches, expressed or implied, to fear from Madelon. "No one had ever so believed in him before!" he would sigh, with a feeling not without a certain pathos in its way, though with the ring of false sentiment characteristic of the man, and with an apparent want of perception that it was ignorance rather than belief that was in question. Madelon believed indeed in his love, for it answered readily to her daily and hourly appeals, but she cannot be said to have believed in his honour and integrity, for she can hardly have known what they meant, and she made no claims upon *them*. It was, perhaps, happy

for her that the day when she should have occasion to do so never arrived.

She was not left quite uneducated, however; her father taught her after his own fashion, and she gained a good deal of practical knowledge in their many wanderings. When she was six years old she could talk almost as many languages, could dance, and could sing a variety of songs with the sweetest, truest little voice; and by the time she was eight or nine, she had learned both to write and read, though M. Linders took care that her range of literature should be limited, and chiefly confined to books of fairy-tales, in which no examples drawn from real life could be found, to correct and confuse the the single-sided views she received from him. This was almost the extent of her learning, but she picked up all sorts of odd bits of information, in the queer mixed so-

ciety which M. Linders seemed everywhere to gather round him, and which appeared to consist of waifs and strays from every grade of society—from reckless young English milords, Russian princes and Polish counts, *soi-disant*, down to German students and penniless artists.

It was, no doubt, fortunate, even at this early age, that Madelon's little pale face, with its wide-open brown eyes, had none of the prettiness belonging to the rosy-cheeked, blue-eyed, golden-haired type of beauty, and that she thus escaped a world of flattery and nonsense. She was silent too in company, as a rule, keeping her chatter and laughter, for the most part, till she was alone with her father, and content sometimes to sit as quiet as a mouse for a whole evening, watching what was going on around her; she was too much accustomed to strangers ever to feel

shy with them, but she cared little for them, unless, as in Horace Graham's case, they happened to take her fancy.

It must not be imagined, however, that M. Linders was quite without conscience as regarded his child; there were some people with whom he took care that she should not associate, some society into which he never took her. Many an evening did Madelon spend happily enough while her father was out, in the snug little parlours of the hotels, where Madame, the landlady, would be doing up her accounts perhaps, and Monsieur, the landlord, reposing after the exertions of the day; whilst Mademoiselle Madelon, seated at the table, would build card-houses, or play at dominoes, and eat galette and confitures to her heart's content. Here, too, she would get queer little glimpses into life—hearing very likely how Monsieur

B. had made off without paying his bill, or how those trunks that Madame la Comtesse C. had left eighteen months ago, as a pledge of her return, had been opened at last, and been found to contain nothing but old clothes, fit for the rag-market; how a few francs might be advantageously added on here and there in the bill for the rich English family at the *premier*; how the gentleman known as No. 5 was looked upon as a suspicious character; and how Pierre the waiter had been set to watch the door of No. 8, who had spent three months in the house without paying a sou, and was daily suspected of attempting to abscond. All these, and a dozen similar stories, and half the gossip of the town, would come buzzing round Madelon's ears as she sat gravely balancing one card on the top of the other. She heard and comprehended them with such comprehension as was in her; and no doubt they modified in some degree her

childish views of life, which in these early years was presented to her, poor child! under no very sublime or elevated aspect; but they had little interest for her, and she paid small heed to them. In truth, her passionate love for her father was, no doubt, at this time her great preservative and safeguard, ennobling her, as every pure unselfish passion must ennoble, and by absorbing her thoughts and heart, acting as a charm against many an unworthy influence around her. The first sound of his footstep outside was enough to put both stories and gossip out of her head, and was the signal for her to spring from her chair, and rush into the passage to meet him; and a few minutes after they would be seated together in their room upstairs, she nestling on his knee most likely, with her arm tight round his neck, while he recounted the adventures of the evening. His purse

would be brought out, and it was Madelon's special privilege and treat to pour out the contents on the table and count them over. If M. Linders had won, it was a little fête for both—calculations as to how it should be spent, where they should go the next day, what new toy, or frock, or trinket should be bought; if he had lost, there would be a moment of discouragement perhaps, and then Madelon would say,

"It does not signify, papa, does it?—you will win to-morrow, you know."

As for M. Linders, the thought of the little, eager innocent face that would greet his return home was the brightest and purest vision that lighted his dark and wayward life, and he appealed to his child's sympathy and encouragement in a way that had something touching in it, showing as it did the gentler side of a man who was always reckless, and could be hard and merciless enough

sometimes; but he was never anything but tender with his little Madelon, and one can fancy the two sitting together, as she counts over the little gold pieces shining in the candlelight. Once, not long after his marriage, he had appealed to his wife in the same way, when, after an unusual run of luck, he had returned in triumph with his winnings. She, poor girl, looked first at them and then at him, with a piteous little attempt at a smile; then suddenly burst into tears, and turned away. It was the first and last time he tried to win her sympathy in these matters, and was, perhaps, the beginning of the sort of estrangement that grew up between them.

These were happy evenings, Madelon thought, but she found those happier still when her father was at home, generally with one or two men who would come in to play cards with him. They were always

good-natured and kind to the little girl who sat so still and close to her father's side, watching the game with her quick, intelligent eyes; though some of them, foolish smooth-faced lads, perhaps, would go away cursing the fate that had ever led them across M. Linders' path, and carrying an undying hatred in their hearts for the handsome courteous man who had enticed them on to ruin. How M. Linders lured these poor birds into the snare, and by what means he plucked them when there, Madelon never knew; all that belonged to the darker side of his character, which she never fully understood, and on which, for her sake, we will not dwell.

Most of all, however, did Madelon enjoy being at the German watering-places, for then she went out with her father constantly. The fair-haired, brown-eyed little girl was almost as well known in the Kursaals of

Homburg and Wiesbaden as the famous gambler himself, as evening after evening they entered the great lighted salons together, and took their places amongst the motley crowd gathered round the long green tables. There she would remain contented for hours, sometimes sitting on his knee, sometimes herself staking a florin or two—"to change the luck," M. Linders would say laughingly,—sometimes wearied out, curled up fast asleep in a corner of one of the sofas. Then there were the theatres, to which her father often took her, and where, with delighted, wondering eyes, she made acquaintance with most of the best operas, and learnt to sing half Bellini's and Weber's music in her clear little voice. More than once, too, she was taken behind the scenes, where she saw so much of the mysteries of stage-working and carpentering as would have destroyed the

illusions of an older person; but it did not make much difference to her; the next time she found herself in the stalls or balcony she forgot all about what was going on behind, and was as much enchanted as ever with the fine results prepared for the public gaze.

On other nights there would be the balls, always a supreme enjoyment. It must be owned that Madelon took great pleasure in seeing her small person arrayed in a smart frock; and she was never weary of admiring the big rooms with their gilded furniture, and mirrors, and brilliant lights, and polished floors, where a crowd of gay people would be twirling about to the sound of the music. She danced like a little fairy, too, with pure delight in the mere motion, was never tired, and rarely sat down; for Mademoiselle, who generally held herself rather aloof from strangers, would be pleased

on these occasions to put on a little winning graciousness, giving her hand with the air of a small princess to any one soliciting the honour of a dance; and she was seldom without some tall partner, attracted by her *gentillesse* and naïve prattle—a moustached Austrian or Prussian officer, perhaps, in white or blue uniform, or one of her counts or barons, with a bit of ribbon dangling from his button-hole; or, if all else failed, there was always her father, who was ever ready to indulge her in any of her fancies, and never resisted her coaxing pleading for one more dance.

These were the evenings; for the days there were pleasures enough too, though of a simpler kind, and more profitable, perhaps, for our poor little Madelon, in her gay unconscious dance through that mad Vanity Fair, innocent though it was for her as yet.

Except on some special emergency, M. Linders rarely went to the gambling tables during the day. He had a theory that daylight was prejudicial to his prosperity, and that it was only at night that he could play there with any fair chance of success; but he not unfrequently had other business of a similar nature on hand to occupy his mornings and afternoons; and when he was engaged or absent, Madelon, with the happy adaptability of a solitary child, had no difficulty in amusing herself alone with her toys, and picture-books, and dolls. At other times, when her father was at leisure, there would be walks with him, long afternoons spent in the gay Kursaal gardens, listening to the bands of music; and on idle days, which with M. Linders were neither few nor far between, excursions perhaps into the country, sometimes the two alone, but more frequently accompanied by one or two of

M. Linders' companions. There they would dine at some rustic Gasthof, and afterwards, whilst her father and his friends smoked, drank their Rhine wine, and brought out the inevitable cards and dice in the shady, vine-trellised garden, Madelon, wandering about here and there, in and out, through yard and court, and garden and kitchen, poking her small nose everywhere, gained much primary information on many subjects, from the growing of cabbages to the making sauerkraut—from the laying of eggs by ever-hopeful hens, to their final fulfilment of a ruthless destiny in a frying-pan. In return, she was not unwilling to impart to the good Hausfrau, and her troop of little ones and retainers, many details concerning her town life; and might sometimes be found, perched on the kitchen table, relating long histories to an admiring audience, in which the blue

silk frocks and tall partners made no small figure, one may be sure.

It was a golden childhood. Even in after years, when, reading the history of these early days in a new light, she suffered a pang for almost every pleasure she had then enjoyed, even then Madelon maintained that her childhood had been one of unclouded happiness, such as few children know. The sudden changes of fortune, from splendour to poverty of the shabbiest description, the reckless, dishonest expenditure, and the endless debts consequent on it; the means —doubtful to say the least of them—employed by M. Linders for procuring money; the sense of alienation from all that is best, and noblest, and truest in life;—all these, which had gone far to make up the sum of her mother's misery, affected our Madelon hardly at all. Some of them she did

not know of; the rest she took as a matter of course. In truth, it mattered little to her whether they lived in a big hotel or a little one; whether the debts were paid or unpaid; whether money were forthcoming or not; she never felt the want of it, we may be sure. If she did not have some promised fête or amusement on one day, it was certain to come on another; and even the one or two occasions on which M. Linders, absolutely unable to leave an hotel until he had paid part of what he owed there, had been obliged to confiscate everything, caused her no uneasiness. The next week, very likely, she had other trinkets and knick-knacks, newer and prettier; and indeed, so long as she had her father, she cared for little else. In any small childish misfortune or ailment she had but to run to him to find help, and sympathy, and caresses; and she had no grief or care in

these first years for which these were not a sufficient remedy.

Amidst all the miserable failures, and more unworthy successes of a wasted life, M. Linders gained at least one legitimate triumph, when he won his child's undying love and gratitude. All her life long, one may fancy, would Madelon cherish the remembrance of his unceasing tenderness, of his unwearying love for his little girl, which showed itself in a thousand different ways, and which, with one warm, loving little heart, at any rate, would ever go far to cover a multitude of sins. The only drawback to her perfect content in these early days was the presence of her uncle Charles, whom she could not bear, and who, for his part, looked upon her as a mere encumbrance, and her being with them at all as a piece of fatuity on the part of his brother-in-law. There were constant skir-

mishes between them while they were together; but even these ceased after a time, for Moore, who, ever since his sister's marriage, had clung fitfully to M. Linders, as a luckier and more prosperous man that himself was accustomed to be absent on his own account for months together, and during one of these solitary journeys that he died, about two years after Horace Graham had seen him at Chaudfontaine. Henceforth Madelon and her father were alone.

Madelon, then, by the time she was eight years old, had learnt to sing, dance, speak several languages, to write, to play *rouge et noir*, and *roulette*, and indeed *piquet* and *écarté*, too, to great perfection, and to read books of fairy tales. At ten years old, her education was still at the same point; and it must be owned that, however varied and sufficient for the purposes of the moment, it

left open a wide field for labour in future years; though M. Linders appeared perfectly satisfied with the results of his teaching so far, and showed no particular desire to enlarge her ideas upon any point. As for religion, no wild Arab of our London streets ever knew or heard less about it than did our little Madelon; or was left more utterly uninstructed in its simplest truths and dogmas. What M. Linders' religious beliefs were, or whether he had any at all, we need not inquire. He at least took care that none should be instilled into his child's mind; feeling, probably, that under whatever form they were presented to her, they would assuredly clash sooner or later with his peculiar system of education. For himself, his opinions on such matters were expressed when occasion arose, only in certain unvarying and vehement declamations

against priests and nuns—the latter particularly, where his general sense of aversion to a class in the abstract, became specific and definite, when he looked upon that class as represented in the person of his sister Thérèse.

Of the outward forms and ceremonies of religion Madelon could not, indeed, remain entirely ignorant, living constantly, as she did, in Roman Catholic countries; but her very familiarity with these from her babyhood robbed them in great measure of the interest they might otherwise have excited in her mind, and their significance she was never taught to understand. As a rule, a child must have its attention drawn in some particular way to its every-day surroundings, or they must strike it in some new and unfamiliar light, before they rouse more than a passing curiosity; and though Madelon would sometimes question her father as to the mean-

ing and intention of this or that procession passing along the streets, he found no difficulty in putting her off with vague answers. It was a wedding or a funeral, he would say, or connected with some other ordinary event, which Madelon knew to be of daily recurrence; though none such had as yet had part in the economy of her small world; and priests, and nuns, and monks became classed, without difficulty, in her mind, with doctors and soldiers, and the mass of people generally, who made money in a different way from her father, with whom, therefore, she seldom came into personal contact, and with whom she had little to do—money making being still her one idea of the aim and business of life.

The first time, however, that she ever entered a church, when she was little more than nine years old, was an experience in her life, and this was the occasion of it. It

was in a French provincial town, where M. Linders had stopped for a day on business—only for one day, but that Madelon was to spend for the most part alone; for her father, occupied with his affairs, was obliged to go out very early, and leave her to her own devices; and very dull she found them, after the first hour or two. She was a child of many resources, it is true, but these will come to an end when a little girl of nine years old, with books and dolls all packed up, has to amuse herself for ever so many hours in a dull country hotel, an hotel, too, which was quite strange to her, and where she could not, therefore, fall back upon the society and conversation of a friendly landlady. Madelon wandered upstairs and downstairs, looked out of all the windows she could get at, and at last stood leaning against the hall-door, which opened on to the front courtyard. It was very quiet

and very dull, nothing moving anywhere; no one crossed the square, sunny space, paved with little stones, and adorned with the usual round-topped trees, in green boxes. Inside the house there was an occasional clatter of plates and dishes, or the resonant nasal cry of "Auguste," or "Henri," from one or other of the servants, but that was all. Madelon found it too tiresome; the *porte-cochère* stood half open, she crossed the court-yard and peeped out. She saw a quiet, sunny street, with not much more life or movement than there was within, but still a little better. Over the high walls surrounding the houses opposite green trees were waving; at one end of the street there was the gleam of a river, a bridge, and a row of poplars; the other end she could not see, for the street made a bend, and a fountain with dribbling water filled up the angle. Presently a little boy in a blue blouse, and

a little girl with a tight round white cap, came up to the stone basin, each with a pitcher to fill; they were a long time about it, for what could be pleasanter, on this hot summer morning, than to stand dabbling one's fingers in the cool water? Madelon watched them till she became possessed with an irresistible desire to do the same. It was only a few steps off, and though she was strictly forbidden by her father ever to go out alone, still—she had so seldom an opportunity of being naughty, that her present consciousness of disobedience rather added, perhaps, to the zest of the adventure. She would go just for this once—and in another moment she was out in the street. The little boy and girl fled with full pitchers as she came up to the fountain, suddenly awakened to a sense of the waste of time in which they had been indulging; but that made no difference to Madelon; she stood

gazing with mute admiration at the open-mouthed monsters, from whose wide jaws the water trickled into the basin below; and then she held her hands to catch the drops till they were quite cold, and thought it the best play she had ever known. By-and-by, however, she began to look about her in search of further excitement, and, emboldened by success, turned the corner of the street, and ventured out of sight of the hotel. On one side large *porte-cochères* at intervals, shutting in the white, green-shuttered houses that appeared beyond; on the other a long, high, blank wall, with nothing to be seen above it, and one small arched doorway about half-way down. This was the shady side; and Madelon, crossing over to it, arrived at the arched door, and stood for a moment contemplating it, wondering what could be inside.

She was not left long in doubt, for two

priests crossed the road, and pushed open the door, without seeing the child, who, urged by a spirit of curiosity, crept unnoticed after them, and suddenly found herself in a cloister, running round a quadrangle, on one side of which rose the walls and spires and buttresses of a great church; in the centre a carefully kept space of smooth grass. Madelon stood for a moment motionless with delight; it reminded her of a scene in some opera or play to which she had been in Paris with her father, but, oh! how much more beautiful, and all real! The sunlight streamed through the tracery of the cloisters, and fell chequered with sharp shadows on the pavement; the bright blue sky was crossed with pinnacles and spires, and there was an echo of music from the church which lured her on. The two priests walked quickly along, she followed,

and all three entered the building by a side door together.

A vast, dim church, with long aisles and lofty pillars, which seemed to Madeleine's unpractised eye, fresh from the outer glare, to vanish in infinite mysterious gloom; a blaze of light at the far-off high altar, with its priests, and incense, and gorgeous garments, and tall candles; on every side shrines and tapers, and pictures, awful, agonised, compassionate Saviours, sad, tender Madonnas; a great silent multitude of kneeling people; and, above all, the organ peeling out, wave after wave of sound, which seemed to strike her, surround her, thrill her with a sense of—what? What was it all? What did it all mean? An awful instinct suddenly woke in the child's heart, painfully struggling with inarticulate cries, as it were, to make itself understood,

even to herself. Wholly inarticulate, for she had been taught no words that could express, however feebly, these vague yearnings, these unutterable longings, suddenly stirring in her heart. This wonderful, solemn music, this place, so strange, so separate from any other she had known, what was it? what did it all mean? Ah, yes, what did it all mean? A little girl, no older than herself, who knelt close by the door, with careless eyes that roamed everywhere, and stared wondering at Madelon's cotton frock and rough uncovered little head, could have explained it all very well; she had a fine gilt prayer-book in her hand, and knew most of her Catechism, and could have related the history of all the saints in the church; she did not find it at all impressive, though she liked coming well enough on these grand fête-days, when everyone wore their best

clothes, and she could put on her very newest frock. But our little stray Madelon, who knew of none of all these things, could find nothing better to do at last than to creep into a dark corner, between a side chapel and a confessional, crouch down, and begin to sob with all her heart.

Presently the music ceased, and the people went pouring out of the great doors of the church. Madelon, roused by the movement around her, looked up, dried her eyes, and came out of her corner; then, following the stream, found herself once more outside, not in the cloister by the door of which she had entered, but at the top of a wide flight of steps, leading down to a large sunny Place, surrounded with houses, where a fair was going on. She was fairly bewildered; she had never been in the town before, and though, in fact, not very far from the

hotel where she was staying, she felt completely lost.

As she stood still for a moment, in the midst of the dispersing crowd, looking scared and dazed enough very likely, she once more attracted the attention of the little girl who had been kneeling near her in the church, and who now pointed her out to her parents, good, substantial-looking *bourgeois*.

"*Comme elle a l'air drôle*," said the child, "with her hair all rough, and that old cotton frock!"

"She looks as if she had lost someone," says the kindly mother. "I will ask her."

"No, she had not lost anyone," Madelon said, in answer to her inquiries, "but she did not know where she was; could Madame tell her the way to the Hôtel de l'Aigle d'Or?"

"It is quite near," Madame answered;

"we are going that way; if you like to come with us, we will show it to you."

So Madelon followed the three down the broad steps, and out into the Place, where she looked a queer little figure enough, perhaps, in the midst of all the gay holiday-folk who were gathered round the booths and stalls. She did not concern herself about that, however, for her mind was still full of what she had seen and heard in the church; and she walked on silently, till presently Madame, with some natural curiosity as to this small waif and stray she had picked up, said, "Are you staying at the hotel, *ma petite?*"

"Yes," answered Madelon, "we came there last night."

"And how was it you went to church all alone?"

"Papa had to go out," says Madelon, getting rather red and confused, "and I

was so dull by myself, and I—I went out into the street, and got into the church by a little door at the side—not that other one we came out at just now; so I did not know where I was, nor the way back again."

"Then you are a stranger here, and have never been to the church before?" said Monsieur.

"No," said Madelon; and then, full of her own ideas, she asked abruptly—"what was everyone doing in there?"

"In there!—in the church, do you mean?"

"Yes, in the church—what was everyone doing?"

"But do you not know, then," said the mother, "that it is to-day a great fête—the fête of the Assumption?"

"No," said Madelon, "I did not know. Was that why so many people were there? What were they doing?" she persisted.

"How do you mean?—do you not go to the *messe* every Sunday?" said Madame, surprised.

"To the *messe!*" answered Madelon—"what is that? I never was in a church before."

"Never in a church before!" echoed a chorus of three astonished voices, while Monsieur added—"Never in this church, you mean."

"No," answered Madelon, "it is the first time I ever went into a church at all."

"But, *mon enfant*," said the mother, "you are big enough to have gone to church long before this. Why, you must be eight or nine years old, and Nanette here went to the *grande messe* before she was five—did you not, Nanettè?"

"Yes," says Nanette, with a further sense of superiority added to that already induced by the contrast of her new white muslin

frock with Madelon's somewhat limp exterior.

"And never missed it for a single Sunday or fête-day since," continued Madame, "except last year, when she had the measles."

"Do you go there every Sunday?" asked Madelon of the child.

"Yes, every Sunday and fête-days. Would you like to see my new Paroissien? My god-father gave it to me on my last birthday."

"And is it always like to-day, with all the singing, and music, and people?"

"Yes, always the same, only not always quite so grand, you know, because to-day is a great fête. Why don't you go to church always?"

"She is perhaps a little Protestant," suggested the father, "and goes to the Temple. Is that not it, my child?"

"I do not know," said Madelon, bewildered; "I never went to any Temple, and I never heard of Protestants. Papa never took me to church; but then we do not live here, you know."

"But in other churches it is the same——everywhere," cries Madame.

"What, in all the big churches in Paris, and everywhere?" said Madelon. "I did not know; I never went into them, but I will ask papa to take me there now." Then, recurring to her first difficulty, she repeated, "But what do people go there for?"

"Mais—pour prier le bon Dieu!" said the good man.

"I do not understand," said Madelon, despairingly. "What does that mean? What were the music and the lights for, and what were all the pictures about?"

"But is it, then, possible, *ma petite*, that you have had no one to teach you all these

things? And on Sundays, what do you do then?" said the mother, while Nanette stared more and more at Madelon, with round eyes.

"We generally go into the country on Sundays," said Madelon. "Papa never goes to church, I am sure, or he would have taken me. I will ask him to let me go again—I like it very much." It was at this moment that they turned into the street in which stood the hotel. "Ah! there is papa," cried Madelon, rushing forward as she saw him coming towards them, and springing into his arms. He had returned to the hotel for a late *déjeûner*, and was in terrible dismay when Madelon, being sought for, was nowhere to be found. One of the waiters said he had seen her run out of the court-yard, and M. Linders was just going out to look for her.

"*Mon Dieu!* Madelon," he cried, "where, then, have you been?"

"I ran out, papa," said Madelon, abashed. "I am very sorry—I will not do it again. I lost myself, but Monsieur and Madame here showed me the way back."

Her friendly guides stood watching the two for a moment, as, after a thousand thanks and acknowledgments, they entered the hotel together.

"It is singular," said Madame; "he is handsome, and looks like a gentleman. How can anyone bring up a little child like that in such ignorance? She can have no mother, *pauvre petite!*"

"What an odd little girl, Maman," cried Nanette, "never to have been to church before, and not to know why people go!"

"*Chut*, Nanette!" said her father. "Thou also wouldst have known nothing, unless some good friends had taught thee." And

so these kindly people went their way.

Madelon, meanwhile, was relating all her adventures to her father. He was too rejoiced at having found her again to scold her for running away; but he was greatly put out, nevertheless, as he listened to her little history. Here, then, was an emergency such as he had dimly foreseen, and done much to avoid, which yet had come upon him unawares, without fault of his, and which he was quite unprepared to meet. He did not, indeed, fully understand its importance, nor all that was passing in his child's mind; but he did perceive that she had caught a glimpse through doors he had vainly tried to keep closed to her, and that that one glance had so aroused her curiosity and interest, that it would be less easy than usual to satisfy her.

"Why do you never go to church, papa?" she was asking. "Why do you not take

me? It was so beautiful, and there were such numbers of people. Why do we not go?"

"I don't care about it myself," he answered, at last, "but you shall go again some day, *ma petite*, if you like it so much."

"May I?" said Madelon. "And will you take me, papa? What makes so many people go? Madame said they went every Sunday and *fête* day."

"I suppose they like it," answered M. Linders. "Some people go every day, and all day long—nuns, for instance, who have nothing else to do."

"It is, then, when people have nothing else to do that they go?" asked Madelon, misunderstanding him, with much simplicity.

"Something like it," answered M. Linders, rather grimly; then, with a momentary compunction, added, "Not precisely. They do

it also, I suppose, because they think it right."

"And do you not think it right, papa? Why should they? I have seen people coming out of church before, but I never knew what it was like inside. I *may* go again some day?"

"When you are older, my child, I will take you again, perhaps."

"But that little girl Nanette, papa, was only five years old when she went first, her mother said, and I have never been at all," said Madelon, feeling rather aggrieved.

"Well, when we go to Florence next winter, Madelon, you shall visit all the churches. They are much more splendid than these, and have the most beautiful pictures, which I should like you to see."

"And will there be music, and lights, and flowers there, the same as here, papa?"

"Oh! for that, it is much the same every-

where," replied M. Linders. "People are much alike all the world over, as you will find, Madelon. Priests, and mummery, and a gaping crowd, to stare and say, 'How wonderful! how beautiful!' as you do now, *ma petite*; but you shall know better some day."

He spoke with a certain bitterness that Madelon did not understand, any more than she did his little speech; but it silenced her for a moment, and then she said more timidly,

"But, papa——"

"Well, Madelon!"

"But, papa, he said—*ce Monsieur*—he said that people go to church *pour prier le bon Dieu.* What did he mean? We often say '*Mon Dieu*,' and I have heard them talk of *le bon Dieu*; is that the same? Who is He then—*le bon Dieu?*"

M. Linders did not at once reply. Made-

lon was looking up into his face with wide-open perplexed eyes, frowning a little with an unusual effort of thought, with the endeavour to penetrate a momentous mystery, which she instinctively felt lay somewhere, and which she looked to him to explain; and he *could* not give her a careless, mocking answer; he sat staring blankly at her for a few seconds, and then said slowly,

"I cannot tell you."

"Do you not know, papa?"

"Yes, yes, certainly I know," he answered hastily, and with some annoyance; "but—in short, Madelon, you are too young to trouble your head about these things; you cannot understand them possibly; when you are older you shall have them explained to you."

"When, papa?"

"Oh, I don't know—one of these days, when you are a great girl, grown up."

"And you can't tell me now?" said Madelon, a little wistfully; "but you will let me go to the church again before that? Oh, indeed it was beautiful, with the lights, and the singing, and the music. Do you know, papa, it made me cry," she added, in a half whisper.

"*Vraiment!*" said M. Linders, with some contempt in his voice, and a slight, involuntary shrug of the shoulders.

The contempt was for a class of emotion with which he had no sympathy, and for that which he imagined had called it forth; not for his little Madelon, nor for her expression of it. But the child shrank back, blushing scarlet. He saw his mistake, perhaps, for he drew her towards him again, and with a tender caress and word tried to turn her thoughts in another direction; but it was too late; the impression had been made, and could never again be effaced.

All unconsciously, with that one inadvertent word, M. Linders had raised the first slight barrier between himself and his child, had given the first shock to that confidence which he had fondly hoped was ever to exist undisturbed between them. In the most sacred hour her short life had yet known, Madeleine had appealed to him for help and sympathy, and she had been repulsed without finding either. She did not indeed view it in that light, nor believe in and love him the less; she only thought she must have been foolish; but she took well to heart the lesson that she should henceforth keep such folly to herself—as far as he was concerned, at any rate.

As for M. Linders, this little conversation left him alarmed, perplexed, uneasy. What if, after all, this small being whom he had proposed to identify, as it were, with himself, by teaching her to see with his eyes,

to apprehend with his understanding, what if she were beginning to develop an independent soul, to have thoughts, notions, ideas of her own, perhaps, to look out into life with eager eyes that would penetrate beyond the narrow horizon it had pleased him to fix as her range of vision, to ask questions whose answers might lead to awkward conclusions? For the moment it seemed to him that his whole system of education, which had worked so well hitherto, was beginning to totter, ready, at any time, it might be, to fall into ruins, leaving him and his child vainly calling to each other across an ever-widening, impassable gulf. Already he foresaw as possible results all that he had most wished to avoid, and felt himself powerless to avert them; for, however ready to alienate her from good influences, and expose her to bad ones, he yet shrank from inculcating falsehood and wrong

by precept. With a boy it would have been different, and he might have had little hesitation in bringing him up, by both precept and example, in the way he was to go; but with his little innocent woman-child—no, it was impossible. She must be left to the silent and negative teachings of surrounding influences, and in ignorance of all others; and what if these should fail? Perhaps he over-estimated the immediate danger, not taking sufficiently into account the strength and loyalty of her affection for him; but, on the other hand, he perhaps undervalued the depth and force of those feelings to the consciousness of which she had first been roused that day. "It shall not occur again, and in time she will forget all about it," was his first conclusion. His second was perhaps wiser in his generation, taking into consideration a wider range of probabilities. "No," he reflected, "there has been an

error somewhere. I should have accustomed Madelon to all these things, and then she would have thought nothing of them. Well, that shall be remedied, for she shall go to every church in Florence, and so get used to them."

CHAPTER VI.

AT FLORENCE.

IF we have dwelt with disproportionate detail on the above little incident, we must be forgiven in consideration of its real importance to our Madeleine, marking, as it did, the commencement of a new era in her life. The sudden inspiration that had kindled for a moment in the great church died away, indeed, as newer impressions more imperatively claimed her attention; but the memory of it remained as a starting point to which any similar sensations subsequently recurring might be referred, as a phenomenon which seemed to contain

within itself the germ and possible explanation of a thousand vague aspirations, yearnings which began about this time to spring up in her mind, and which almost unconsciously linked themselves with that solemn hour the remembrance of which, after her conversation with her father, she had set apart in her own heart, to be pondered on from time to time, but in silence, —a reticence too natural and legitimate not to be followed by a hundred others of a similar kind.

M. Linders, for reasons of his own, with which we need not concern ourselves here, spent the following autumn and winter in Florence, establishing himself in an apartment for the season, contrary to his usual practice of living in hotels; and this was how it happened that Madelon made two friends who introduced quite a new element into her life, one which, under other

circumstances, might hardly have entered into it as a principle of education at all. The rooms M. Linders had taken were on the third floor of a large palazzo with many occupants, where a hundred feet daily passed up and down the common staircase, the number of steps they had to tread increasing for the most part in direct proportion to their descent in the social grade which, with sufficiently imposing representatives on the first floor, reached its minimum, in point of wealth and station, in the fifth storey garret. On the same floor as Madelon and her father, but on the opposite side of the corridor, lived an American artist; and M. Linders had not been a week in the house before he recognized in him an ancient *confrère* of his old Parisian artist days, who, after many wanderings to and fro on the earth, had finally settled himself

in Florence. The old intimacy was renewed without difficulty on either side. M. Linders was made free of the American's *atelier*, and he, for his part, willingly smoked his pipe of an evening in the Frenchman's little salon. He was a great black-bearded yellow-faced fellow, with a certain careless joviality about him, that made him popular, though leading a not very respectable life; always extravagant, always in debt, and not averse to a little gambling and betting when they came in his way. He was a sufficiently congenial spirit for M. Linders to associate with freely; but he was kind-hearted, honourable after his own fashion, and had redeeming points in an honest enthusiasm, in a profound conviction of the grand possibilties of life in general, and of his art in particular. He was no great artist, and his business consisted mainly in making copies

of well-known pictures, which he did with great skill, so that they always commanded a ready sale in the Florence market. But he also painted a variety of original subjects, and, in unambitious moments, occasionally surprised himself by producing some charming little picture which encouraged him to persevere in this branch of his art.

This man took a great fancy to Madelon, in the first instance from hearing how prettily and deftly she spoke English; and she, after holding herself aloof in dignified reserve for three days from this new acquaintance, was suddenly won over in a visit to his *atelier*, which henceforth became to her a sort of wonderland, a treasure domain, where she might come and go as she pleased, and where, from beneath much accumulated dust, persevering fingers might extract unimagined prizes, in the shape of

sketches, drawings, plaster casts, prints, and divers queer posessions of different kinds. After this, she soon became fast friends with the American, who was very kind and good-natured to her, and M. Linders' promise that she should see all the churches in Florence was fulfilled by the artist. He took her to visit both them and the galleries, showed her the famous pictures, and told her the names of their painters; and the genuine reverence with which he gazed on them, his ever-fresh enjoyment and appreciation of them, impressed her, child as she was, far more than any mere expressions of admiration or technical explanation of their merits would have done.

Sometimes, if she accompanied him to any of the churches where he happened to be copying a picture, he would leave her to wander about alone, and they were strange

weird hours that she spent in this way. She did not indeed again assist at any of the great church ceremonies, but the silent spaces of these chill, grand, solemn interiors impressed her scarcely less with a sense of mysterious awe. Tapers twinkled in dim side chapels, pictures and mosaics looked down on her from above, rare footsteps echoed along the marble pavements, silent figures knelt about here and there, pillars, marbles, statues gleamed, and heavy doors and curtains shut in the shadowy, echoing, silent place from the sunshine, and blue sky, and many coloured life without. Madelon, wandering about in the gloom, gliding softly into every nook and corner, gazing at tombs and decorated altars and pictures, wondered more and more at this strange new world in which she found herself, and which she had no one to interpret to her.

It had a mysterious attraction for her, as nothing had ever had before; and yet it was almost a relief at last to escape again into the warm, sunny out-of-door life, to walk home with the painter through the bright narrow streets, listening to his gay careless talk, and lingering, perhaps, at some stall, in the busy market-place, to buy grapes and figs; and then to take a walk with her father into the country, where roses nodded at her over garden walls, and vines were yellowing beneath the autumn sky. Her sensitive perception of beauty and grandeur was so much greater than her power of grasping and comprehending them, that her poor little mind became oppressed and bewildered by the disproportion between the vividness with which she received new impressions, and her ability for seizing their meaning.

The pictures themselves, which, be long, she learnt to delight in, and ever some sort to appreciate, were a perpe source of perplexity to her in the unkn subjects they represented. Her want knowledge in such matters was so comp that her American friend, who, no do took it for granted that she had b brought up in the religion of the coun never even guessed at it, not imagining t a child could remain so utterly uninstruc in the simple facts and histories; and, so how, Madelon divined this, and began have a shy reluctance in asking questi which would betray an unsuspected ign ance. "This is such or such a Madon the artist would say; "there you see Elizabeth, and that is St. John the Bap you know." Or he would point out Agnes, or St. Cecilia, or St. Catherine, the case might be.

"Who was St. Catherine?" Madelon ventured to ask one day.

"Did you never hear of her?" he answered. "Well then, I will tell you all about her. There were, in fact, two St. Catherines, but this one here, who, you see, has a wheel, lived long before the other. There once dwelt in Alexandria a lovely and accomplished maiden—" And he would no doubt have related to her the whole of the beautiful old mystical legend; but her father, who happened to be with them that day, interrupted him.

"Don't stuff the child's head with that nonsense," he said, and, perhaps, afterwards gave his friend a hint; for Madelon heard no more about the saints, and was left to puzzle out meanings and stories for the pictures for herself—and queer enough ones she often made, very likely. On the other hand, the American, who liked to talk to

her in his own tongne, and to make her chatter to him in return, would tell her many a story of the old master painters, of Cimabue and the boy Giotto, of Lionardo da Vinci, and half a dozen others; old, old tales of the days when, as we sometimes fancy looking back through the mist of centuries, there were giants on the earth, but all new and fresh to our little Madelon, and with a touch of romance and poetry about them as told by the enthusiastic artist, which readily seized her imagination; indeed he himself, with his black velvet cap, and short pipe, and old coat, became somehow ennobled and idealised in her simple mind by his association through his art with the mighty men he was teaching her to reverence.

Madelon spent much of her time in the painter's *atelier*, for her father took it into his head this winter to try his hand once more at his long neglected art, and, armed

with brushes and palette, passed many of his leisure hours in his friend's society. We cannot accredit M. Linders with any profound penetration, or with any subtle perception of what was working in his little daughter's mind, but with the most far-reaching wisdom he could hardly have devised better means, at this crisis in her life, for maintaining his old hold upon her, and keeping up the sense of sympathy between them, which had in one instance been disturbed and endangered.

She was just beginning to be conscious of the existence of a new and glorious world, where money-making was, on the whole, in abeyance, and roulette tables and croupiers had apparently no existence at all; and the sight of her father at his easel day after day, at once connected him with it, as it were, since he also could produce pictures—*tout comme un autre.* Then M. Linders could

talk well on most subjects, and in the discussions that the two men would not unfrequently hold concerning pictures, Madelon was too young, and had too strong a conviction of her father's perfect wisdom, to discern between his mere clever knowledge of art and the American's pure love and enthusiasm; or if, with some instinctive sense of the difference, she turned more readily to the latter for information, that was because it was his *métier*; whereas with papa——Oh! with papa it was only an amusement; his business was of quite another kind.

The American amused himself by painting Madelon more than once; and she made a famous little model, sitting still and patiently for hours to him and to her father, who had a knack of producing any number of little, affected, meretricious pictures, in the worst possible style and taste. Years afterwards, Madelon revisited the studio, where the

black-bearded friendly American, grown a little bent and a little grey, was still stepping backwarks and forwards before the same easel standing in the old place; orange and pomegranate trees still bloomed in the windows; footsteps still passed up and down the long corridor outside where her light childish ones had so often echoed; the old properties hung about on the walls; and there, amongst dusty rolls piled up in a corner, Madelon came upon more than one portrait of herself, a pale-faced, curly-headed child, who looked out at her from the canvas with wistful brown eyes that seemed full of the thoughts that at that time had begun to agitate her poor little brain. How the sight of them brought back the old vanished days! How it stirred within her sudden tender recollections of the quiet hours when, dressed out in some quaint head-gear, or *contadina* costume, or merely in her own every-

day frock, she had sat perched up on a high stool, or on a pile of boxes, dreaming to herself, or listening to the talk between the two men.

"That man is a fool," the American would exclaim, dashing his brush across a whole morning's work; "that man is a presumptuous fool who, here in Florence, here where those others have lived and died, dares to stand before an easel and imagine that he can paint—and I have been that man!" He was wont to grow noisy and loquacious over his failures—not moody and dumb, as some men do.

"You concern yourself too much," M. Linders would reply calmly, putting the finishing touch to Madelon as a *bergère* standing in the midst of a flock of sheep, and a green landscape—like the enlarged top of a *bonbonnière*. "You are too ambitious, *mon cher*—you are little, and want to be great—

hence your discomfort; whilst I, who am little, and know it, remain content."

"May I be spared such content!" growled the other, who was daily exasperated by the atrocities his friend produced by way of pictures. It was beyond his comprehension how any man could paint such to his disgrace, and then calmly contemplate them as the work of his own hands. "Heaven preserve me from such content, I say!"

"But it is there you are all in the wrong," says M. Linders, quite unmoved by his companion's uncomplimentary energy. "You agitate, you disturb yourself with the idea that some day you will become something great—you begin to compare yourself with these men whose works you are for ever copying, with who knows?—with Raffaelle, with Da Vinci——"

"I compare myself with them!" cries the American, interrupting him. "I! No, *mon*

ami, I am not quite such a fool as that. I reverence them, I adore their memory, I bow down before their wonderful genius "—and as he spoke he lifted his cap from his head, suiting his action to his words—"but compare myself!—I!" Then picking up his brush again, he added, "But the world needs its little men as well as its great ones—at any rate, the little ones need their *pot au feu;* so to work again. *Allons, ma petite,* your head a little more this way."

This little conversation, which occurred nearly at the beginning of their acquaintance, the painter's words and manner, his energy, his simple, dignified gesture as he raised his cap—all made a great impression on our Madelon; it was indeed one of her first lessons in that hero-worship whereby lesser minds are brought into *rapport* with great ones; and, even while they reverence afar off, exultingly feel that they in some sort

share in their genius through their power of appreciating it. Nor was it her last lesson of the same kind.

Her second friend was an old German violinist, who inhabited two little rooms at the top of the big house, a tall, broad-shouldered, stooping man, whose thick yellow hair and moustache, plentifully mixed with grey, blue eyes, and fair complexion, testified to his nationality, as did his queer, uncouth accent, though he had spent at least two-thirds of his life in Florence. He was an old friend of the American painter's, and paid frequent visits to his studio; and it was there he first met Madelon and her father. He did not much affect M. Linders' company, but he took a fancy to the child, as indeed most people did, and made her promise that she would come and see him; and when she had once found her way, and been welcomed to his little bare room,

where an old piano, a violin, and heaps of dusty folios of music, were the principal furniture, a day seldom passed without her paying him a visit. She would perch herself at his window, which commanded a wide view over the city, with its countless roofs, and domes, and towers, and beyond the encircling hills, with their scattered villas, and slopes of terraced gardens, and pines, and olives, all under the soft blue transparent sky; and with her eyes fixed on this sunny view, Madelon would go off into some dreamy fit, as she listened to the violinist, of whose playing she never wearied. He was devoted to his art, though he had never attained to any remarkable proficiency in it; and at any hour of the day he might be heard scraping, and tuning, and practising, for he belonged to the orchestra of one of the theatres. It was quite a new sensation for Madelon to hear so much music in private

life, and she thought it all beautiful—tuning and scraping and all.

"But that is all rubbish," the German would cry, after spending an hour in going through some trashy modern Italian music. "Now, my child, you shall hear something worth listening to;" and with a sigh of relief he would turn to some old piece by Mozart or Bach, some minuet of Haydn's, some romance of Beethoven's, which he would play with no great power of execution, indeed, but with a rare sweetness and delicacy of touch and expression, and with an intense absorption in the music, which communicated itself to even so small a listener as Madelon.

It would have been hard to say which of the two had the more enjoyment—she, as she sat motionless, her chin propped on her two hands, her brown eyes gazing into space, and a hundred dreamy fancies vague-

ly shaped by the music, flitting through her brain; or he, as he bent over his violin, lovingly extracting the sweet sounds, and his thoughts—who knows where?—anywhere, one may be sure, rather than in the low-ceiled, dusty garret, redolent of tobacco smoke, and not altogether free from a suspicion of onions.

"There, my child," he would say at the end, "that is music—that is art! What I was playing before was mere rubbish—trash, unworthy of me and of my violin."

"And why do you play it?" asks Madelon, simply.

"Ah! why, indeed?" said the violinist—"because one must live, my little Fräulein; and since they will play nothing else at the theatre, I must play it also, or I should be badly off."

"You are not rich, then?" said Madelon.

"Rich enough," he answered. "I gain

enough to live upon, and I ask no more."

"Why don't you make money like papa?" says Madelon; "then you could play what you liked, you know. We are very rich sometimes."

The old German screwed up his queer, kind, ugly face.

"It—it's not my way," he said drily. "As for money, I might have had plenty by this time, if I had not run away from home when I was a boy, because I preferred being a poor musician to a rich merchant. Money is not the only nor the best thing in the world, my little lady."

M. Linders apparently saw no danger to Madelon's principles in these new friendships, or else, perhaps, he was bent on carrying out his plan of letting her get used to things; at any rate, he did not interfere with her spending as much time as she liked with both painter and musician; and

every day through the winter she grew fonder of the society of the old violinist. He was a lonely man, who lived with his music and his books, cared little for company, and had few friends; but he liked to see Madelon flitting about his dusky room, carrying with her bright suggestions of the youth, and gaiety, and hopefulness he had almost forgotten. He talked to her, taught her songs, played to her as much as she liked, and often gave her and her father orders for the theatre to which he belonged, where, with delight, she would recognise his familiar face as he nodded and smiled at her from the orchestra. He instructed her, too, in music; made her learn her notes, and practise on the jangling old piano, and even, at her particular request, to scrape a little on the violin; but she cared most for singing, and for hearing him play and talk. She never felt shy or timid with him, and

one day, at the end of a long rhapsody about German music and German composers, she asked him innocently enough—

"Who was Beethoven, and Mozart, and —and all those others you talk about? I never heard of them before."

"Never before!" he cried, in a sort of comic amazement and dismay. "Here is a little girl who has lived half her life in Germany, who talks German, and yet never heard of Beethoven, nor of Mozart, nor of —of all those others! Listen, then—they were some of the greatest men that ever lived."

And, indeed, Madelon heard enough about them after that; for delighted to have a small, patient listener, to whom he could rhapsodize as much as he pleased in his native tongue, the violinist henceforth lost no opportunity of delivering his little lectures, and would harangue for an hour to-

gether, not only about music and musicians, but about a thousand other things —a queer, high-flown, rambling jumble, often enough, which Madelon could not possibly follow nor understand, but to which she nevertheless liked to listen. A safer teacher she could hardly have had; she gained much positive information from him, and when he got altogether beyond her, she remained impressed with the conviction that he was speaking from the large experiences of deep, mysterious wisdom and knowledge, and sat listening with a reverential awe, as to some strange, lofty strain, coming to her from some higher and nobler region than she could hope to attain to as yet, and of which she could in some sort catch the spirit, though she could not enter into the idea. At the same time there was a certain childlike vein running through all the old man's rambling talk, which made it, after all, not un-

suited to meet the instinctive aspirations of a child's mind. With him love and veneration for greatness and beauty, in every form, amounted almost to a passion, which was still fresh and genuine, as in the lad to whom the realization of the word *blasé* seems the one incomprehensible impossibility of life. In the simple reverence with which he spoke of the great masters of his art, Madelon might have recognized the same spirit as that which animated the American; and as the artist had once uncovered at the name of Raffaelle and Lionardo da Vinci, so did the musician figuratively bow down at the shrines of Handel, or Bach, or Beethoven. From both these men, so different in other respects, the child began to learn the same lesson, which in all her life before she had never even heard hinted at.

All this, however, almost overtaxed our little Madelon's faculties, and it was not sur-

prising that, as the winter wore on, a change gradually came over her. In truth, both intellect and imagination were being overstrained by the constant succession of new images, new ideas, new thoughts, that presented themselves to her. She by no means grew accustomed to churches—not in the sense, at any rate, which her father had hoped would be the result of his new system. It was not possible that she should, while so much remained that was mysterious and unexplained; she only wearied her small brain with the effort to find the explanation for all these new perplexities, which she felt must exist somewhere, though she could not find it; add to this, these long conversations, this music, with its strange, vague suggestions, and even the thousand novelties of the picturesque Italian life around her, not one of which was lost on her im-

pressionable little mind, and we need not wonder that she began to suffer from an excitement that gathered in strength from day to day. She grew thin, morbid, nervous, ate almost nothing, and lost her usual vivacity, sitting absorbed in dreamy fits, from which it was difficult to arouse her, and which were very different from the quiet, happy silence in which she used to remain contented by her father's side for hours. All night she was haunted with what she had seen by day in picture-galleries and churches. The heavenly creations of Fra Angelico or Sandro Botticelli, of Ghirlandaio or Raffaelle, over which she had mused and pondered, re-produced themselves in dreams, with the intensity and reality of actual visions, and with accessories borrowed from all that, in her new life, had impressed itself most vividly on her imagination. Once

more she would stand in the vast church, the censers swinging, the organ pealing overhead, round her a great throng of beatified adoring saints, with golden glories, with palms, and tall white lilies, and many-coloured garments; or pillars and arches would melt away, and she would find herself wandering through flower-enamelled grass, in fair rose-gardens of Paradise; or radiant forms would come gliding towards her through dark-blue skies; or the heavens themselves would seem to open, and reveal a blaze of glory, where, round a blue-robed, star-crowned Madonna, choirs of rapturous angels repeated the divine melodies she had heard faintly echoed in the violinist's dim little room. All day long these dreams clung to her, oppressing her with their strange unreal semblance of reality, associating themselves with every glowing sunset, with every starry sky, till the pictures them-

selves that had suggested them looked pale by comparison.

She was, in fact, going through a mental crisis, such as, in other circumstances, and under fostering influences, has produced more than one small ecstatic enthusiast; the infant shining light of some Methodist conventicle; the saintly child visionary of some Catholic convent. But Madelon had no one to foster, nor to interpret for her these feverish visions, so inexplicable to herself, poor child! To the good-natured, careless, jovial American, she would not have even hinted at them for worlds, and not less carefully did she shun appealing to her father for sympathy. That contemptuous "*vraiment*" dwelt in her memory, not as a matter of resentment, but as something to be avoided henceforth at the cost of any amount of self-repression. She would sit leaning her languid little head on his

shoulder; but when he anxiously asked her what ailed her, she could only reply, "I don't know, papa." And indeed she did not know; nor even if she had, could she have found the words with which to have explained it to him. It was, after all, the old German who won her confidence at last. There was, as we have said, something simple, genuine, homely about the old man; a reminiscence, perhaps, of his homely Fatherland still clinging about him, after more than forty years of voluntary exile, which Madelon could well appreciate, though she could not have defined it; for a child judges more by instinct than reflection, and it was through no long process of reasoning that she had arrived at the certainty that she would be met here by neither contempt nor indifference. Moreover, his generally lofty and slightly incomprehensible style of

conversation, and the endless stores of learning with which she had innocently accredited him, had surrounded him with that vague halo of wisdom and goodness, so dear to the hearts of children of larger as of smaller growth, and which they are so eager to recognize, that they do not always distinguish between the false and the true. From the very beginning of their acquaintance, it had occurred to Madelon that she might be able to gain some information on that subject, which her father had pronounced to be above her comprehension as yet; but which, on reflection, and encouraged by a Nanette's example, she felt quite sure she could understand if it were only explained to her. Twenty times had that still unanswered question trembled on her lips, but a shy timidity, not so much of her old friend as of the subject itself, which had become invested

in her mind with a kind of awful mystery, to which a hundred circumstances daily contributed, checked her at the moment of utterance.

One evening, however, she was sitting as usual at the window in the old man's room. The sun had set, the short twilight was drawing to a close, church bells were ringing, down in the city yellow lights were gleaming in windows here and there, above, the great sky rounded upwards from a faint glow on the horizon through imperceptible gradations of tint, to pure depths of transparent blue overhead, where stars were beginning to flash and tremble; within, in the gloom, the musician sat playing a sacred melody of Spohr's, and as Madelon listened, some subtle affinity between this hour and the first one she had spent in the church touched her, and her eyes filled with sudden tears of painful ecstasy. As the old German ceased,

she went up to him with an impulse that admitted of no hesitation, and, as well as she could, told him all that was in her mind—her dreams, her strange weird fancies, all that for the last few months had been haunting and oppressing her with its weight of mystery. "Papa said I could not understand," she said in conclusion, "but I think I could. Will you not explain it to me? Can you not tell me what it all means, and who—who is God?"

The German had heard in silence till then, but at this last question he started from his listening attitude.

"*Was—was—*" he stammered, and suddenly rising—"*Ach, mein Gött!*" he cried, with the familiar ejaculation, "to ask me!—to ask me!"

He walked twice up and down the room, as stirred by some hidden emotion, his head bowed, his hands behind his back, murmur-

ing to himself, and then stopped where Madelon was standing by the window. She looked up, half trembling, into the rugged face bent over her. He was her priest for the moment, standing as it were between earth and heaven—her confessor, to whom she had revealed the poor little secrets of her heart; and she waited with a sort of awe for his answer.

"My child," he said at length, looking down sadly enough into her eager, inquiring eyes, "when I was no older than thou art, I had a pious, gentle mother, at whose knee night and morning I said my prayers—and believed. If she were alive now, I would say, 'Go to her, and she will tell thee of all these things'—but do not speak of them to me. Old Karl Wendler is neither good, nor wise, nor believing enough to instruct thee, an innocent child."

He made this little speech very gently and solemnly; then turned away abruptly, took up his hat, and left the room without another word. Madelon stood still for a minute, baffled, repulsed, with a sort of bruised, sore feeling at her heart, and yet with a new sense of wondering pity, roused by something in his words and manner; then she too left the room, and through the darkness crept softly downstairs.

So ended this little episode with the violinist. Not that she did not visit and sit with him as much as before; the very next day, when she returned, rather shyly, upstairs, she found him sitting in the old place, with the old nod and smile to welcome her, but somehow he managed to put things on a different footing—he spared her his long metaphysical discourses, and talked to her more as the child that she was,

laughing, joking, and telling her queer hob-goblin and fairy stories, some of which she knew before indeed, but which he related with a quaint simplicity and naïveté, which gave them a fresh charm for her; and under this new aspect of things, she brightened up, began to lose her fits of dreaminess, to chatter as in old times, and cheered many an hour of the musician's solitary life. The American artist, too, left Florence about this time for a visit to Rome; and during his absence the *atelier* was closed, and wanderings through churches and picture galleries were exchanged for long excursions into the country with her father; by degrees dreams, fancies, visions floated away, and Madelon became herself again.

She had gone through a phase, and one not altogether natural to her, and which readily passed away with the abnormal con-

ditions that had occasioned it. She was by no means one of those dreamy, thoughtful, often melancholy children who startle us by the precocious grasp of their intellect, by their intuitive perception of truths which we had deemed far above their comprehension. Madelon's precocity was of quite another order. In her quick, impulsive, energetic little mind there was much that was sensitive and excitable, little that was morbid or unhealthy. One might see that, with her, action would always willingly take the place of reflection; that her impulses would have the strength of inspirations; that she would be more ready to receive impressions than to reason upon them. Meditation, comparison, introspection, were wholly foreign to this little, eager, impetuous nature, however they might be forced upon it in the course of years and events;

and with her keen sense of enjoyment in all glad outward influences, one might have feared that the realities of life present to her would too readily preclude any contemplation of its hidden possibilities, but for a lively, susceptible imagination, which would surely intervene to prevent any such tendency being carried out to its too prosaic end. It was through appeals to her imagination and affection, rather than to her reason and intellect, that Madeleine could be influenced; and whatever large sympathies with humanity she might acquire through life, whatever aspirations after a high and noble ideal, whatever gleams of inspiration from the great beyond that lies below the widest, as well as the narrowest horizon, might visit her—all these would come to her, we may fancy, through the exercise of pure instincts and a sensitive imagination,

rather than through the power of logical deduction from given causes.

From our small, ten-year-old Madelon, however, all this still lay hidden; for the present, the outward pressure, which had weighed too heavily on her little mind and brain, removed, she returned with a glad reaction to her old habits of thought and speech. Not entirely, indeed; the education she had received, remained and worked; the "obstinate questionings," an answer to which she had twice vainly sought, were unforgotten, and still awaited their reply. This little Madelon, to whom the golden gates had been opened, though ever so slightly—to whom the divine, lying all about her and within her, had been revealed, though ever so dimly—could never be quite the same as the little Madelon who, careless and unthinking, had strayed into

the great church that summer morning six months ago; but the child herself was as yet hardly conscious of this, and neither, we may be sure, was M. Linders, as with renewed cheerfulness, and spirits, and chatter, she danced along by his side under the new budding trees, under the fair blue skies.

It was soon after this, when the delicious promise of an early spring was brightening the streets and gardens of Florence, filling them with sunshine and flowers, that another shadow fell upon the brightness of Madelon's life, and one so dark and real, as to make all others seem faint and illusory by comparison. Her father had a serious illness. He had not been well all the winter; and one day, Madelon, coming down from the violinist's room, had been frightened almost out of her small wits at finding him lying back unconscious in a chair in

their little *salon.* She called the old woman who acted as their servant to her assistance, and between them they had soon succeeded in restoring him to consciousness, when he had made light of it, saying it was merely a fit of giddiness, which would have passed off. He had refused to be alarmed, or to send for a doctor, even after a second and third attack of the same kind; but then a fever, which in the mild spring weather was lurking about, lying in wait for victims, seized him, and laid him fairly prostrate.

His illness never took a really dangerous turn, but it kept him weak and helpless for some weary weeks, during which Madelon learnt to be a most efficient little nurse, taking turns with the old servant and with the violinist, who willingly came down from his upper regions to do all he could to help his little favourite. In some respects she, perhaps, made the best nurse of all, with

her small skilful fingers, and entire devotion to her father. She had a curious courage, too, for such an inexperienced child, and the sense of an emergency was quite sufficient to make her conquer the horrible pang it gave her loving little heart to see her father lying racked with pain, unconscious, and sometimes delirious. She never failed to be ready when wanted; the doctor complimented her, and said jokingly that the little Signorina would make a capital doctor's assistant. Her German friend nodded approval, and, best of all, it was always to his Madelon that M. Linders turned in his most weary moments—from her that he liked to receive drinks and medicine; and she it was who, as he declared, arranged his pillows and coverings more comfortably than anyone else. In delirium he asked for her continually; his eyes sought

her when she was not in the room, and lighted up when she came with her little noiseless step to his bedside. The old German, who had had a strong dislike to, and prejudice against this man, took almost a liking for him, as he noted the great love existing between him and his little daughter.

The American did not return till M. Linders was nearly well again, and thinking of departure. Madelon was in despair at the idea of leaving Florence; it had been more like home to her than any place she had yet known, and it almost broke her heart to think of parting with her old German friend; but M. Linders was impatient to be gone. He wanted change of air, he said, after his illness; but, indeed, had other reasons which he proclaimed less openly, but which were far more imperative,

and made him anxious to pay an earlier visit to Germany this year than was usual with him. Certain speculations, on the success of which he had counted, had failed, so that a grand *coup* at Homburg or Baden seemed no less necessary than desirable to set him straight again with the world, and he accordingly fixed on a day towards the end of April for their departure.

The American made a festive little supper the evening before in his *atelier*, but it was generally felt to be a melancholy failure, for not even the artist's rather forced gaiety, nor M. Linders' real indifference, could enliven it. As for the old German, he sat there, saying little, eating less, and smoking a great deal; and Madelon at his side was speechless, only rousing herself later in the evening to coax him into playing once more all her favourite tunes. Everyone, except, perhaps, M. Linders, felt

more or less sorry at the breaking up of a pleasant little society which had lasted for some months, and the violinist almost felt as if he were being separated from his own child. Madelon wished him good-bye that night, but she ran upstairs very early the next morning to see him once more before starting.

The old man was greatly moved; he was standing looking sadly out of the window when she came in, and when he saw her in her little travelling cloak, the tears began to run down his rugged old cheeks.

"God bless thee, my little one!" he said. "I shall miss thee sorely—but thou wilt not forget me?"

"Never, never!" cries Madelon, with a little sob, and squeezing the kind hands that held hers so tightly.

"And if I should never see thee again,"

said the German, in broken accents, "if—if —remember, I——" He hesitated and stammered, and M. Linders' voice was heard calling Madelon.

"I must go," she said, "papa is calling me; but I will never forget you—never; ah! you have been so good, so kind to me. See here," she said, unclosing one of her hands which she had kept tightly shut, and showing the little green and gold fish Horace Graham had given her years before, "I promised never to part with this, but I have nothing else—and—and I love you so much—will you have it?"

"No, no," said the old man, smiling and shaking his head, "keep thy promise and thy treasure, my child; I do not require that to remind me of thee. Farewell!"

He put her gently out of the door as her father's step was heard coming upstairs, and

closed it after her. She never did see him again, for he died in less than two years after their parting.

M. Linders went to Homburg, to Baden, to Wiesbaden, but he was no longer the man he had been before his illness; he won largely, indeed, at times, but he lost as largely at others, playing with a sort of reckless, feverish impatience, instead of with the steady coolness that had distinguished him formerly. Old acquaintance who met him said that M. Linders was a broken man, and that his best days were over; men who had been accustomed to bet on his success, shrugged their shoulders, and sought for some steadier and luckier player to back; he himself, impatient of ill-luck, and of continual defeat in the scenes of his former triumphs, grew restless and irritable, wandered from place to place in search of

better fortune and better health, and at length, at the end of a fortnight's stay at Wiesbaden, after winning a large sum at *rouge-et-noir*, and losing half of it the next day, announced abruptly that he was tired of Germany, and should set off at once for Paris. Madelon had noticed the alteration in her father less than anyone else perhaps; she was used to changes of fortune, and whatever he might feel he never showed it in his manner to her; outwardly, at least, this summer had appeared to her very similiar to any preceding one, and she was too much accustomed to M. Linders' sudden moves, to find anything unusual in this one, although, dictated as it was by a caprice of weariness and disgust, it took them away from the German tables just at the height of the season. Once more, then, the two set out together, and towards the

middle of August found themselves established in their old quarters in the Paris Hotel, where Madame Linders had died, and where Madame Lavaux still reigned head of the establishment.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

AFTER FIVE YEARS.

ONE evening, about three weeks after their arrival in Paris, Madelon was standing at a window at the end of the long corridor into which M. Linders' apartment opened; the moon was shining brightly, and she had a book in her hand, which she was reading by its clear light, stopping, however, every minute to gaze down into the front courtyard of the hotel, which lay beneath the window, quiet, almost deserted after the bustle of theday, and full of white moonlight and black shadows. Her father was out,

and she was watching for his return, though it was now long past eleven o'clock.

There was nothing unusual on her part in this late vigil, for she was quite accustomed to sit up for her father, when he spent his evenings away from home; but there must have been something strange and forlorn-looking in the little figure standing there all alone at such an hour, for a gentleman, who had come in late from the theatre, paused as he was turning the key of the door before entering his room, looked at her once or twice, and, after a moment's hesitation, walked up to the window. Madelon did not notice him till he was close behind her, and then turned round with a little start, dropping her book.

"I did not think it was you—" she began; then seeing a stranger, stopped short in the middle of her speech.

"I am afraid I have startled you," said

the gentleman in English-French, but with a pleasant voice and manner, "and disappointed you too."

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur," she answered, "I thought it was papa; I have been looking for him for so long," and she turned round to the window again.

It was five years since Horace Graham and Madeleine had spent an hour together in the courtyard at Chaudfontaine, so that it was not surprising that they did not at once recognise each other at this second unforeseen meeting; the young man, as well as the child, had then been of an age to which five years cannot be added without bringing with them most appreciable changes. For Graham, these years had been precisely that transition period in which a lad separates himself from the aggregate mass of youth, and stands forth in the world as a man in his own right, according to that which is in him.

This tall, thin, brown young army doctor, who has passed brilliant examinations, who is already beginning to be known favourably in the profession, whose name has appeared at the end of more than one approved article in scientific Reviews; who has travelled, seen something of Italy, Switzerland, Belgium; who for five years has been studying, thinking, living through youthful experiences and failures, and out-living some youthful illusions, cannot fail, one may be sure, to be a different personage, in many respects, from the fresh-hearted medical student who had sauntered away an idle Sunday amongst the woods and valleys round Chaudfontaine, and had looked with curious, half wondering eyes at the new little world disclosed to him at the hotel. As for our little Madelon, the small, round, pinafored child was hardly recognisable in this slim little girl, in a white frock, with brown hair

that hung in short wayward tangling waves, instead of curling in soft ringlets all over her head; and yet Graham, who rarely forgot a face, was haunted by a vague remembrance of her eyes, with the peculiar look, half-startled, half-confiding, with which they met the first glance of strangers. Madelon's brown eyes were the greatest charm of a face which was hardly pretty yet, though it had the promise of beauty in after years; to liken them to those of some dumb, soft, dark-eyed animal is to use a trite comparison; and yet there is, perhaps, no other that so well describes eyes such as these, which seem charged with a meaning beyond that with which their owner is able to express in words, or is, perhaps, even conscious of. When seen in children, they seem to contain a whole prophecy of their future lives, and in Madelon they had probably a large share in the powers of attraction which she un-

doubtedly possessed; few could resist their mute appeal, which, child as she was, went beyond her own thought, and touched deeper sympathies than any she could yet have known.

There was a moment's silence after Madelon had spoken, and then she once more turned from the window with a disappointed air.

"Pardon, Monsieur," she said again, "but can you tell me what time it is? Is it past eleven?"

"It is more than half-past," said Graham, looking at his watch, "Have you been waiting here long?"

"Since ten o'clock," said Madelon, "papa said he would be in by ten. I cannot think where he can be."

"He has probably found something to detain him," suggested Graham.

"No," answered Madelon, rejecting this

obvious proposition; "for he had an appointment here; there is some one waiting for him now."

"Then he has perhaps come in without your knowing it?"

"I do not think so," said Madelon, "he would have called me; and besides, I should have seen him cross the courtyard. I saw you come in just now, Monsieur."

Nevertheless she left her station by the window, and moved slowly along the passage to their apartment; it was just opposite Graham's, and as she went in, leaving the door open, Horace, who had followed her without any very definite purpose, looked in. It was a tolerably large room, with a door to the left opening into a smaller apartment, Utrecht velvet chairs and sofa, a mantelpiece also covered with velvet, on which stood a clock, a tall looking-glass, and two lighted wax candles; a table in the

middle with some packs of cards, and a liqueur bottle and glasses, and a bed on one side opposite the fireplace. The window looked on to a side street, noisy with the incessant rattling of vehicles, and so narrow that the numerous lighted interiors of the houses opposite were visible to the most casual observer. A smell of smoking pervaded the room, explained by the presence of a young man, who held a cigar in one hand, whilst he leaned half out of the window, over the low iron balcony in front, shouting to some one in the street below. He looked round as Madelon came in, and slowly drew himself back into the room, exhibiting a lean, yellow face, surrounded with dishevelled hair, and ornamented by black unkempt beard and moustache.

"*Monsieur votre père* does not arrive apparently, Mademoiselle," he said.

"I have not seen him come in, Monsieur," answered Madelon; "I thought he was perhaps here."

"Not at all, I have seen nothing of him this evening. But this is perhaps a trick that Monsieur le Papa is playing me; he fears to give me his little revenge of which he spoke, and wishes to keep out of my way. What do you say to that, Mademoiselle?"

"I am quite sure it is not so," answered Madelon, with a little defiant air. "I heard papa say it was quite by chance he had lost all that money to you, for you did not understand the first principles of the game."

"Ah! he said that? But it is lucky for us other poor devils that we have these chances sometimes! You will at least admit that, Mademoiselle?"

"Papa plays better than anyone," says Madelon, retreating from argument to the

safer ground of assertion, and still standing in the middle of the room in her defiant attitude, with her hands clasped behind her.

"Without a doubt, Mademoiselle; but then, as he says, we also have our chances. Well, I cannot wait for mine this evening, for it is nearly midnight, and I have another appointment. These gentlemen will wonder what has become of me. Mademoiselle, I have the honour to wish you good evening."

He made a profound bow, and left the room.

Madelon gave a great sigh, and then came out into the passage again where Horace was standing. He had been a somewhat bewildered spectator of this queer little interview, but the child evidently saw nothing out of the way in it, for she made no remark upon it, and only said rather piteously,

"I cannot imagine where papa can be; I do wish he would come back."

"Does he often stay out so late as this?" asked Graham.

"Oh! yes, often, but not when he says he is coming in early, or when he is expecting anyone."

"And do you know where he is gone?"

"No, not at all. He said he was going to dine with some gentlemen, but I don't know where. Oh! do you think anything —anything can have happened?" cried Madelon, her hidden anxiety suddenly finding utterance.

"Indeed I do not," answered Graham, in his kindest voice. "His friends have persuaded him to stay late, I have no doubt; you must not be so uneasy—these things often happen, you know. Let us go and look out of the window again; perhaps we shall see him just coming in."

They went to the end of the corridor accordingly; but no one was to be seen, except

the man who had just left M. Linders' apartment walking briskly across the moonlit space below, the great doors of the *porte-cochère* closing after him with a clang that resounded through the silent courtyard. Graham had nothing further to say in the way of consolation; he could think of no more possible contingencies to suggest, and, indeed, it was useless to go on reasoning concerning perfectly unknown conditions. Madelon, however, seemed a little reassured by his confident tone, and he changed the subject by asking her whether the gentleman who had just left was a friend of hers.

"Who? Monsieur Legros?" Madelon answered. "No, I don't know him much, and I do not like him at all; he comes sometimes to play with papa."

"To play with him?"

"Yes, at cards, you know—at *écarté*, or *piquet*, or one of those games."

"And it was with him that your father had an appointment?"

"Yes," said Madelon; "he came last night, and papa told him to be here again this evening at ten, and that is why I cannot think why he does not come."

She turned again disconsolately to the window, and there was another pause. Madelon relapsed into the silence habitual to her with strangers, and Graham hardly knew how to continue the conversation; yet he was unwilling to leave the child alone with her anxiety at that late hour; and besides, he was haunted by vague, floating memories that refused to shape themselves definitely. Some time—somewhere—he had heard or seen, or dreamt of some one—he could not catch the connecting link which would serve to unite some remote, foregone experience with his present sensations.

He moved a little away from the window,

and in so doing his foot struck against the book which Madelon had dropped on first seeing him, and he stooped to pick it up. It was a German story-book, full of bright coloured pictures; so he saw as he opened it and turned over the leaves, scarcely thinking of what he did, when his eye was suddenly arrested by the inscription on the fly-leaf. The book had been given to Madelon only the year before by a German lady she had met at Chaudfontaine, and there was her name, "Madeleine Linders," that of the donor, the date, and below, "Hôtel des Bains, Chaudfontaine." It was a revelation to Horace. Of course he understood it all now. Here was the clue to his confused recollections, to the strange little scene he had just witnessed. Another moonlit courtyard came to his remembrance, a gleaming, rushing river, a background of shadowy hills, and a little coy, wilful, chattering girl, with curly

hair and great brown eyes—those very eyes that had been perplexing him not ten minutes ago.

"I think you and I have met before," he said to Madelon, smiling; "but I daresay you don't remember much about it, though I recollect you very well now."

"We have met before?" said Madelon. "Pardon, Monsieur, but I do not very well recall it."

"At Chaudfontaine, five years ago, when you were quite a little girl. You are Madeleine Linders, are you not?"

"Yes, I am Madeleine Linders," she answered. "I have often been to Chaudfontaine; did you stay at the hotel there?"

"Only for one night," said Graham; "but you and I had a long talk together in the courtyard that evening. Let me see, how can I recall it to you? Ah! there was a little green and gold fish——"

"Was that you?" cried Madelon, her face suddenly brightening with a flush of intelligence and pleasure. "I have it still, that little fish. Ah! how glad I am now that I did not give it away! That gentleman was so kind to me, I shall never forget him. But it was you!" she added, with a sudden recognition of Graham's identity.

"It was indeed," he said laughing. "So you have thought of me sometimes since then? But I am afraid you would not have remembered me if I had not told you who I was."

"I was such a little girl then," said Madelon colouring. "Five years ago—why I was not six years old; but I remember you very well now," she added, smiling up at him. "I have often thought of you, Monsieur, and I am so glad to see you again."

She said it with a little naïve air of frank-

ness and sincerity which was very engaging, giving him her hand as she spoke.

"I am glad you have not quite forgotten me," said Graham, sitting down by her on the window seat; "but indeed you have grown so much, I am not sure I should have recollected you, if I had not seen your name here. What have you been doing ever since? Have you ever been to Chaudfontaine again?"

"Oh, very often," said Madelon. "We go there almost every year for a little while—not this year though, for we were at Wiesbaden till three weeks ago, and then papa had to come to Paris at once."

"And do you still go about everywhere with your papa, or do you go to school sometimes?"

"To school? oh no, never," said Madelon, not without some wonder at the idea. "Papa would not send me to school. I

should not like it at all, and neither would he. I know he would not get on at all well without me, and I love travelling about with him. Last winter we were in Italy."

"And you never come to England?"

"No, never. I asked papa once if he would not go there, and he said no, that we should not like it at all, it was so cold and *triste* there, one never amused one's-self."

"But I thought you had some relations there," said Graham. "Surely I saw an uncle with you who was English?"

"Oh yes, Uncle Charles; but he never went to England either, and he died a long time ago. I don't know of any other relations."

"So you never talk English now, I suppose? Do you remember telling me to speak English, because I spoke French so funnily?"

"No," said Madelon, colouring and laughing. "How is it possible I can have been so rude, Monsieur? I think you speak it very well. But I have not forgotten my English, for I have some books, and often we meet English or American gentlemen, so that I still talk it sometimes."

"And German too," said Horace, looking at her book.

"Yes, and Italian; I learnt that last winter at Florence. We meet a great many different people, you know, so I don't forget."

"And you are always travelling about?"

"Yes, always; I should not like to live in one place, I think, and papa would not like it either, he says. Do you remember papa, Monsieur?"

"Very well," said Graham; and indeed he recalled perfectly the little scène in the salle-à-manger of the Chaudfontaine hotel

—the long dimly lighted room, the two men playing at cards, and the little child nestling close up to the fair one whom she called papa. "Yes, I remember him very well," he added, after a moment's pause.

"How strange that you should see us here again!" said Madelon. "Did you know we were staying in the hotel, Monsieur?"

"Not at all," answered Horace, smiling. "I only arrived yesterday, and had no notion that I should find an old acquaintance to welcome me."

"How fortunate that I was waiting here, and that you saw my name in that book," said Madelon, evidently looking on the whole as a great event, brought about by a more remarkable combination of circumstances than everyday life as a rule afforded. "Without that you would not have known who I was, perhaps? Papa will be very

glad to see you again. Ah, how I wish he would come!" she added, all her anxieties suddenly revived.

"Do you always sit up for him when he is so late?" said Graham. "Surely it would be wiser for you to go to bed."

"That is just what I said to Mademoiselle an hour ago," said a kind, cheery voice behind them, belonging to Madame Lavaux, the mistress of the hotel. "Of what use, I say, is it for her to sit up waiting for her papa, who will not come any the sooner for that."

"Ah! Madame, I must wait," said Madelon. "Papa will come soon."

"But, *ma chère petite*—" began Madame.

"I must wait," repeated Madelon, piteously; "I always sit up for him."

Graham thought he could not do better than leave her in the hands of the landlady, and with a friendly good-night, and a pro-

mise to come and see her the next day, he went back to his own room. In a few minutes, he heard Madame pass along the corridor and go upstairs to bed; but, though tired enough himself after a day of Paris sight-seeing, he could not make up his mind to do the same, when, on opening his door, he saw Madeleine standing where he had left her. He could not get rid of the thought of this lonely little watcher at the end of the passage, and taking up a book he began to read. From time to time he looked out, but there was no change in the posture of affairs; through the half-open door opposite he could see the lights burning in the still empty room, and the small figure remained motionless at the moonlit window. All sounds of life and movement were hushed in the hotel, all the clocks had long since struck midnight, and he was considering whether he should not go and speak to

Madelon again, when he heard a faint cry, and then a rush of light feet along the passage and down the staircase.

"So he has come at last," thought Graham, laying down his book with a sense of relief, not sorry to have his self-imposed vigil brought to an end. He still sat listening, however; his door was ajar, and he thought he should hear the father and child come up together. There was a moment's silence as the sound of the footsteps died away, and then succeeded a quick opening and shutting of doors, the tread of hasty feet, a confusion of many voices speaking at once, a sudden clamour and stir breaking in on the stillness, and then suddenly subdued and hushed, as if to suit the prevailing quiet of the sleeping house.

"Something must have happened," thought Graham. "That poor child!—perhaps her father has, after all, met with some acci-

dent!" He left his room and ran quickly downstairs. The confused murmur of voices grew louder as he approached the hall, and on turning the last angle of the staircase, he at once perceived the cause of the disturbance.

A little group was collected in the middle of the hall, the night porter, one or two of the servants of the hotel, and some men in blouses, all gathered round a tall prostrate man, half lying on a bench placed under the centre lamp, half supported by two men, who had apparently just carried him in. He was quite insensible, his head had fallen forward on his breast, and was bound with a handkerchief that had been tied round to staunch the blood from a wound in his forehead; his neckcloth was unfastened and his coat thrown back to give him more air. The little crowd was increasing every moment, as the news spread

through the house; the *porte-cochère* stood wide open, and outside in the street a *fiacre* could be seen, standing in the moonlight.

"A doctor must be fetched at once," someone was saying, just as Horace came up and recognized, not without difficulty, in the pale disfigured form before him, the handsome fair-haired M. Linders he had met at Chaudfontaine five years before.

"I am a doctor," he said, coming forward. "Perhaps I can be of some use here."

No one seemed to notice him at first—a lad had already started in quest of a surgeon, and jumping into the empty *fiacre* that had brought the injured man to the hotel, was driving off; but Madelon turned round at the sound of Graham's voice, and looked up in his face with a new expression of hope in her eyes, instead of the blank, bewildered despair with which she had been gazing at

her father and the strange faces around. To the poor child it seemed as if she had lived through an unknown space of terror and misery during the few minutes that had elapsed since from the passage window she had seen the *fiacre* stop, and, with the presentiment of evil which had been haunting her during these last hours of suspense, intensified to conviction, had flown downstairs only to meet her father's insensible form as he was carried in. She was kneeling now by his side, and was chafing one of his cold hands between her poor little trembling fingers; but when she saw Graham standing at the edge of the circle she got up, and went to him.

"Will you come to papa?" she said, taking him by both hands and drawing him forward.

"Don't be frightened," said Horace, in his kind, cheerful voice, trying to encourage

her, for her face and lips were colourless, and she was trembling as with a sudden chill. He put one arm round her, and came forward to look at M. Linders.

"Allow me," he said; and this time his voice commanded attention, and imposed a moment's silence on the confusion of tongues. "I am a doctor, and can perhaps be of some use; but I must beg of you not to press round in this way. Can any one tell me what has happened?" he added, as he bent over M. Linders.

"It was an accident, Monsieur," said a man of the working-class, standing by, "this poor gentleman must have had some kind of fit, I think. I was crossing the Boulevards with him about ten o'clock; there were a good many carriages about, but we were going quietly enough, when suddenly I saw him stop, put his hand to his head, and fall down in the road. I had to run just then

to get safely across myself, and when I reached the other side, I saw a great confusion, and heard that a carriage had driven straight over him."

There was a moment's pause, and Madelon said in a tremulous whisper, "Papa used to have *vertiges* last winter, but he got quite well again."

"To be sure," said Graham; "and so we must hope he will now. That was more than two hours ago," he said, turning to the man—"what have you been doing ever since?"

"We carried him into the nearest *café*, Monsieur, and some proposed taking him to a hospital, but after a time we found a letter in his pocket addressed to this hotel, and we thought it best to bring him here, as he might have friends; so we got a *fiacre*. But it was a long way off, and we were obliged to come very slowly."

"A hospital would perhaps have been the better plan," said Graham; "or you should have found a doctor before moving him. However, now he must be carried upstairs without further delay. My poor child," he said, turning to Madelon, "you can do no good here—you had better go with Madame, who will take care of you; will you not, Madame?" he added, turning to the landlady, who, roused from her bed, had just appeared, after a hasty toilette.

"Yes, yes, she can come with me," said Madame Lavaux, who was not in the best of tempers at the disturbance; "but I beg of you not to make more noise than you can help, Messieurs, or I shall have the whole house disturbed, and half the people leaving to-morrow."

The sad little procession moved quietly enough up the stairs, and along the corridor to M. Linders' room. Graham had gone on in

front, but Madame Lavaux had held back Madelon when she would have pressed forward by the side of the men who were carrying her father, and she had yielded at first in sheer bewilderment. She had passed through more than one phase of emotion in the course of the last ten minutes, poor child! The first overwhelming shock and terror had passed away, when Graham's reassuring voice and manner had convinced her that her father was not dead; but she had still felt too stunned and confused to do more than obey passively, as she watched him carefully raised, and slowly carried from the hall. By the time they reached the top of the staircase, however, her natural energy began to reassert itself; and, as she saw him disappear within the bedroom, her impatient eagerness to be at his side again, could not be restrained. His recent illness was still too fresh a memory for the mere sight of his pre-

sent suffering and insensibility to have any of the terrors of novelty, after the first shock was over, and all her former experiences went to prove that his first words on recovering consciousness would be to ask for her. Her one idea was that she must go at once and nurse him; she had not heeded, nor, perhaps, even heard Graham's last words, and she was about to follow the men into the bedroom, when Madame Lavaux interposed to prevent her.

"Run upstairs to my room, *petite*," she said; "you will be out of the way there, and I will come to you presently."

"No," said Madelon, refusing point-blank, "I am going with papa."

"But it is not possible, my child; you will only be in the way. You heard what M. le Docteur said?"

"I *will* go to papa!" cries Madelon, trembling with agitation and excitement; "he will

want me, I know he will, I am never in his way! You have no right to prevent my going to him, Madame! Let me pass, I say," for Madame Lavaux was standing between her and the door of the room into which M. Linders had been carried.

"*Allons donc*, we must be reasonable," says Madame. "Your papa does not want you now, and little girls should do as they are told. If you had gone to bed an hour ago, as I advised, you would have known nothing about all this till to-morrow. Eh, these children! there is no doing anything with them; and these men," she continued with a sigh, "the noise they make with their great boots! and precisely Madame la Comtesse, *au premier*, had an *attaque des nerfs* this evening, and said the house was as noisy as a barrack—but these things always happen at unfortunate moments!"

No one answered this little speech, which,

in fact, was addressed to no one in particular. It was, perhaps, not altogether Madame Lavaux' fault that through long habit her instincts as the proprietor of a large hotel had ended by predominating so far over her instincts as a woman as always to come to hand first. The nice adjustment between the claims of conscience and the claims of self-interest, between the demands of her bills and the demands of never-satisfied, exacting travellers, alone involved a daily recurring struggle, in which the softer emotions would have been altogether out of place, we may suppose. In the present instance she considered it a hard case that her house should be turned topsy-turvy at such an untimely hour, and its general propriety endangered thereby; and Madelon's grief, which at another time would have excited her compassion, had for the moment taken the unexpected form of determined opposition,

and could only be looked upon as another element of disturbance. Madelon herself, however, who could hardly be expected to regard her father's accident with a view to those wider issues that naturally presented themselves to Madame Lavaux, simply felt that she was being cruelly ill-used. She had not attended to a word of this last speech, but nevertheless she had detected the want of sympathy, and it by no means increased her desire to accede to Madame's wishes.

"I *will* go to papa," she repeated, the sense of antagonism that had come uppermost gaining strength and vehemence from the consciousness of the underlying grief and sore trouble that had aroused it, "or I will stay here if you will not let me pass; rather than go away I will stand here all night."

Graham had heard nothing of this little altercation, but now coming out of the bed-

room to speak to Madame Lavaux, he found a most determined little Madelon standing with her hands clasped behind her, and her back set firmly against the wall, absolutely refusing to retreat.

She sprang forward, however, as soon as she saw him.

"I may go to papa now, may I not?" she cried.

"Mademoiselle wants to go to her papa," says Madame, at the same moment, "I beg of you, Monsieur, to tell her it is impossible, and that she had better come with me. She asserts that her father will want her."

"That is all nonsense," said Graham hastily; "of course she cannot come in now," then noticing Madelon's poor little face, alternately white, and flushed with misery and passion, he said, "Listen to me, Madelon; you can do your father no good now. He would not know you, my poor child, and

you would only be in the way. But I promise you that by-and-by you shall see him."

"By-and-by," said Madelon; "how soon?"

"As soon as we can possibly manage it."

Nothing, perhaps, would have induced Madelon at that moment to have given into Madelon Lavaux' unsupported persuasions, but she yielded at once to Horace; indeed her sudden passion had already died away at the sight of his face, at the sound of the kind voice which she had somehow begun to associate with a sense of help and protection. She did not quite give up her point even now, however.

"I need not go upstairs?" she said, with trembling lips and tears in her eyes. "I may go into my own room, may I not?"

"Your room? Which is that?" asked Graham.

"This one—next to papa," she said, pointing to the door that led into the passage.

"Yes, you can stay there if you like; but don't you think you would be better with Madame Lavaux, than all by yourself in there?"

"No, I would rather stay here," she answered, and then pausing a moment at the door, "I may come and see him presently?" she added wistfully, "I always nursed him when he was ill before."

"I am sure you are a very good little nurse," said Graham kindly, "and I will tell you when you may come; but it will not be just yet. So the best thing you can do will be to go to bed, and then you will be quite ready for to-morrow."

He had no time to say more, for his services were required. He gave Madelon a

candle, closed the door that communicated between the two rooms, and she was left alone.

CHAPTER II.

A FAREWELL LETTER.

MADELON was left alone to feel giddy, helpless, bewildered in the reaction from strong excitement and passion. She was quite tired and worn-out, too, with her long watching and waiting; too weary to cry even, or to think over all that had happened.

She did not go to bed, however; that would have been the last thing she would have thought of doing; for, Graham's last words notwithstanding, she had a notion that in a few minutes she would be called to

come and watch by her father, as she had often done in the old days at Florence; so she only put down her candle on the table, and curled herself up in a big arm-chair; and in five minutes, in spite of her resolution to keep wide awake till she should be summoned, she was sound asleep.

Low voices were consulting together in the next room, people coming in and out; the French doctor who had been sent for arriving; cautious footsteps, and soft movements about the injured man. But Madelon heard none of them, she slept soundly on, and only awoke at last to see her candle go out with a splutter, and the grey light of dawn creeping chilly into the room. She awoke with a start and shiver of cold, and sat up wondering to find herself there; then a rush of recollections came over her of last night, of her father's accident, and she jumped up quickly, straightening herself,

stretching her little stiff limbs, and pushing back her tumbled hair with both hands from the sleepy eyes that were hardly fairly open even now.

Her first movement was towards the door between the two bedrooms, but she checked herself, remembering that Monsieur le Docteur had told her she must not go in there till she was called. There was another door to her room leading into the corridor, and just at that moment she heard two people stop outside it, talking together in subdued tones.

"Then I leave the case altogether in your hands," says a strange man's voice. "I am absolutely obliged to leave Paris for B—— by the first train this morning, and cannot be back till to-morrow night; so, as you say, Monsieur, you are in Paris for some time——"

"For the next few days, at any rate," answered the other; and Madelon recognized

Graham's voice and English accent, "long enough to see this case through to the end, I am afraid."

"If anything can be done, you will do it, I am sure," interrupted the other with warmth. "You must permit me to say, Monsieur, as an old man may say to a young *confrère*, that it is seldom one meets with so much coolness and skill in such a very critical case. Nothing else could have saved——"

The voices died away as the speakers walked towards the end of the passage. Madelon had hardly taken in the sense of the few sentences she had heard; she was only anxious now to see Graham and ask if she might go to her father, so she opened her door softly and crept into the passage, meeting Horace as he returned towards the sick-room after seeing the French doctor off. He looked down on the little figure all pale and ruffled in the cold grey light.

"Why, I thought you were asleep," he said. "Would you like to see your father now? You may come in, but you must be very quiet, for he is dozing."

"Then he is better?" said Madelon, anxiously.

Graham did not answer; he opened the door and led her in. The room looked cheerless with the shaded night-lamp casting long shadows, which mingled with those that the growing daylight was chasing away. M. Linders was lying with his head supported on a heap of pillows; his forehead was bandaged where the deep cut had been given just above the brow, and he looked deadly pale; his eyes were closed, he was breathing heavily, and Madelon thought that, as Graham had told her, he was asleep; but it was, in fact, rather a kind of stupor, from which louder noises than the sound of her soft footfall would have failed to rouse him.

She went on tiptoe up to his bedside, and stood gazing at him for a moment, and then with a swift, silent movement buried her face in her hands, and burst into an agony of crying.

"He is very ill—oh! is he going to die?" was all the answer she could give in a hoarse whisper to Graham's attempts at comfort, trying the while to smother her sobs, so that they might not break out and wake her father.

"I hope not—I hope not," said Horace, quite grieved at the sight of her distress; "but you must not cry so, Madelon; how are you to nurse him and help him to get well again if you do?"

She stopped sobbing a little at this, and tried to check her tears.

"Do you really think he will get well again?" she said; "he looks so ill."

Graham did not at once answer. In

truth, he saw no prospect of M. Linders' ultimate recovery, though he would probably regain consciousness, and might, perhaps, linger on for a few days. But there always remained the hope born of a determination not to despair, and it seemed cruel, at that moment, not to share it with our poor little Madelon.

"We must hope so," he said at last, "we must always hope for the best, you know; but he must be kept very quiet, so you and I, Madelon, must do our best to watch him, and see that he is not disturbed."

"Yes," said Madelon, drying her eyes quite now. "I will take care of him."

"Very well, then, if you will sit with him now, I will go and speak to Madame Lavaux, if she is up; there are several arrangements I have to make."

He went away, leaving Madelon contented for the moment, since she could sit

and watch by her father; she remained motionless, her eyes fixed on his face, her hands clasped round her knees, her whole mind so absorbed in keeping perfectly quiet, the one thing she could do for him just then, that she hardly ventured to breathe. But not even yet did she understand the full meaning of what had happened, nor clearly comprehend all that she had to dread. She was not really afraid that her father would not recover; she knew indeed that he was very ill, much worse than he had ever been at Florence, and that it might be a long, long time before he would be well again, but she did not think that he was going to die. She had asked the question indeed, prompted by an instinctive terror that had seized her, but in fact she hardly knew what death meant, much less had she ever conceived of her father as dead, or imagined life without him. Nevertheless,

the sudden panic had left a nameless, unrecognized fear lurking somewhere, which gave an added intensity to her desire that he would wake up and speak to her once more; and sometimes the beating of her own heart seemed to deafen her, so that she could not hear the sound of his heavy irregular breathing, and then nothing but the dread of disturbing him could have prevented her from jumping up and going to him to make sure that he was still sleeping. When would he awaken and look at her and speak to her again? It appeared so long since she had heard his voice, and seen him smile at her; since he had wished her good-bye the evening before, she seemed to have lived through such long hours of unimagined terror and sorrow, and all without being able to turn to him for the sure help, for the loving protection and sympathy that had ever been ready for his little

Madelon; and even now, he did not know how she was watching him, nor how she was longing to go to him and kiss him, to put her arms round his neck, and lay her soft little cheek caressingly against his. This thought was the most grievous of all to Madelon just then, and the big tears came into her eyes again, and fell slowly one by one into her lap.

Graham, however, returning presently, somehow seemed to bring courage and consolation with him. Madelon brightened up at once when he sat down by her and told her that he had asked Madame Lavaux to send them up some coffee, so that they might have it together there; and then, seeing the tears on her sad little face, he assured her in his kind way that her father would wake up presently and speak to her, and that, in the meantime, she need not sit quite so still, as she would not disturb

him if she moved about quietly ; and when, by-and-by, the *café-au-lait* arrived, they had their little meal together, whilst he told her in a low voice how her father had partially recovered his consciousness in the night and asked for her, but had been quite satisfied when he heard she had gone to bed, and had afterwards gone off to sleep as Madelon saw him now.

"By-the-by, Madelon," Graham said presently, "tell me if you have any relations living in Paris, or any friends that you go and visit sometimes?"

"No," says Madelon wondering, "I have no relations—only papa."

"No uncles, or aunts, or cousins?"

"No," said Madelon again, "only Uncle Charles, who died, you know."

"Ah, yes—that was an English uncle; but your papa, has he no brothers or sisters in Paris, or anywhere else?"

"I never heard of any," said Madelon, to whom this idea of possible relations seemed quite a new one. "I never go to visit anyone."

"Then you have no friends living in Paris —no little companions, no ladies who come to see you?"

"No," answers Madelon, shaking her head, "we don't know anyone in Paris, except some gentlemen who come to play with papa—like Monsieur Legros, you know —only some are nicer than he is; but I don't know the names of them all. At Wiesbaden I knew a Russian princess, who used to ask me to go and see her at the hotel—oh, yes, and a German Countess, and a great many people that we met at the tables and at the balls, but I daresay I shall never see them again; we meet so many people, you know."

"And you have no other friends?"

"Oh, yes," said Madelon, her eyes shining suddenly, "there was the American artist, who lived in our house in Florence, and the old German who taught me to sing and play the violin; I was very fond of him, he was so good—so good."

"Who were they?" asked Graham.

Madelon explained, not in the least understanding the purport of all these questions, but her explanation did not help Graham much. In truth, he was revolving some anxious thoughts. In accepting the charge of this sick man, he felt that he had incurred a certain responsibility, not only towards M. Linders, but towards his little girl, and any relations or friends that he might have. It was on Madelon's account above all that he felt uneasy; what was to become of her if her father died—and Graham had little doubt that he was dying—all friendless and alone in the world as she

would apparently be? Had any arrangements for the future been made, any provision left for her? What was to become of this poor child, clinging so closely to her father, and so dependent upon him that she seemed to have no thoughts nor ideas apart from him?

Graham had been questioning Madame Lavaux as to what she knew of M. Linders and his life, and had gained much information on some points, though very little on others. Madame Lavaux had readily related the history of Madelon's birth and Madame Linders' death. It was a story she was fond of telling; it had been a little romance in the ordinary routine of hotel life, and one in which, when she had duly set forth M. Linders' heartlessness and her own exertions, she felt that she must shine in an exceptionally favourable light; and indeed it was so pitiful a tale that her hearers could

not but share the indignation and compassion she felt and expressed when she spoke of *cette pauvre dame*, who so young and so beautiful had been left alone to give birth to her infant, and, still alone, to die four months later. But when Graham endeavoured to get at any facts bearing directly upon the present emergency, he found Madame Lavaux less well-informed. M. Linders had come to her hotel year after year, she said, and she had always taken him in, on the little girl's account (who was a *chère petite*, though troublesome sometimes, as children would be); otherwise she would have been sorry to have such a *mauvais sujet* about the house, in and out at all hours, and queer-looking men sitting up with him half the night. Had he any relations or friends? That she did not know, she had never seen or heard of any, but she did not wonder at that—they did well to keep

clear of him, a bad man, who had broken more hearts than his wife's, she would answer for it. For the rest, she knew little about him, she added, with a sudden fit of professional reticence, induced by the recollection that it might be as well not to gossip too much about the affairs of her *clientèle*; he came and went, paid his bill regularly enough, generally seemed to have money at his command, and of course it was not for her to inquire how he got it, though she might have her suspicions. What was to become of his little girl in case of his death? Madame had never thought of that; did Monsieur think he was going to die? In that case how much better to have taken him to the hospital; a death in the house was always so inconvenient and disagreeable—not that she had grudged it to that *pauvre* Madame Linders, but this was a different thing altogether; would he cer-

tainly die? Monsieur said he did not know, one must always hope, but the case was a grave one, and seeing that Madame could give him no help he left her.

He had questioned Madeleine in the hope that she would be able to tell him of some one for whom he could send, or to whom he could at least write, but here again he was baffled, and he could only wait now for the moment when M. Linders should recover consciousness.

The hotel was all astir by this time with life and movement, doors opening and shutting, footsteps up and down the staircases and corridors, voices talking, calling, grumbling, downstairs eating and drinking going on with much clattering of plates and dishes, fiacres and omnibuses driving up, tourists setting off in gay parties for their day's sight-seeing, luggage being moved, travellers coming, travellers going, to Eng-

land, to the north, to the south, to the ends of the earth—all the busy restless hotel life going on except in this one silent room, where two people sat very quietly watching a third, who, as one of them foresaw sadly enough, would never take part in all this stir and bustle of life again. Outside was broad sunny daylight now, but within it was all dim and cool, for the night had been hot, and the window stood wide open, and now the morning air blew freshly through the Venetian shutters, that were closed to darken the room and shut out the sun, which later would shine full upon them. The morning hours slipped away; there was nothing to be done while M. Linders remained in this state, and Madelon, by Horace's advice, took a book, and seated herself on a low stool by the window to read. Now and then she would stand looking at her father with a most pitiful

yearning in her great brown eyes; once or twice, M. Linders, in his dull slumber, half torpor, half sleep, seemed in some sort conscious of her presence; he moved his head uneasily, said "Madeleine," and then some low muttered words which she could not catch, but he never quite roused up, and after each throb of expectation and hope, she could only return to her book, and her silent watching.

Graham went in and out, or sat reading and writing at the table, and at twelve o'clock he made Madelon go downstairs to breakfast with Madame Lavaux in her own little sitting-room. Madame, who was really very fond of her, had forgotten all about the altercation of the night before. Indeed she was both good-natured and kind-hearted as soon as she could allow her better impulses to have their own way; but she was a little apt, as are most people to whom life

resolves itself into a narrow ministering to their personal pains and pleasures, to look upon untoward occurrences as evidence of the causeless animosity of some vague impersonality, continually on the watch to adjust the largest events of life so as to occasion her particular inconvenience. If half Paris and its environs had been destroyed by an earthquake, her first impression of the catastrophe would very possibly have been that it could not have happened at a worse moment for raising the price of early asparagus, though the further reflection that the general want of accommodation would justify her in doubling her hotel tariff, might in some measure have restored her faith in the fitness of things. After this, she would have found time to be overwhelmed with compassion for the sufferers. M. Linders' accident, she found, had, as yet, been attended with no evil results, so far as she

was concerned; no one had been disturbed in the night, no one had left, so that, for the moment, it had been safely transferred to that region of abstract facts, which she could consider dispassionately, and judge by the light of her kindly impulses; and it was under the influence of these that she was now bent on petting and making much of Madelon, giving her cakes and confitures and all kinds of good things. On second thoughts she had rejected the idea that M. Linders was going to die; it would be so very troublsome and inconvenient, that she found it pleasanter to persuade herself that he would surely recover; and now, on the strength of this conviction, and with a kind wish to console Madelon, she became so encouraging, so certain he would be well again in a few weeks—in a few weeks did she say?—in a few days—with this clever English doctor, who, as she improvised

for the occasion, everyone knew was one of the first doctors in London—with all this Madame so encouraged and cheered our Madelon, that she came upstairs again at the end of an hour looking quite bright, and almost expecting to see some wonderful change for the better in her father. M. Linders, however, still lay as she had left him, and perhaps the sight of his pale bloodless face chilled her, for she crept silently to her corner, and took up her book again, without saying a word of her new hopes. Presently Graham, looking up from his writing, found that she had done the best thing possible under the circumstances, for, with her book lying open upon her lap, and her head resting against the window-frame, she had fallen fast asleep. He went up to her, raised her gently in his arms, and carried her into her own room; so perfectly sound asleep was she, that she

hardly stirred, even when he laid her on her bed; and then, drawing the curtain round her, he left her to herself.

If this long morning had passed slowly and sadly for our sorrowful little Madelon, it had been a time of anxiety and uneasiness enough for Horace Graham also; who had never, I daresay, felt more nervous than during these quiet hours when M. Linders, partly from the effects of his accident, partly from the opiates that had been given him, lay unconscious. He was young in his profession, and though clever and skilled enough in the technical part, he had had little experience in what may be called the moral part of it, and he positively shrank from the moment when this man, of whose life and character he knew something, should wake up, and he should have to tell him that he was dying. It was so absolutely necessary, too, that he should know the

danger he was in; for if, as was too probable from his mode of life, his affairs were in disorder, and his arrangements for his child's future had still to be made, the time that remained to him was in all human probability but short. For the rest, Graham felt in himself small capacity for preaching or exhortation, and indeed from a professional point of view, he dreaded a possible outburst of excitement and remorse, as lessening his last chance of saving his patient's life; and yet to him—young, full of energy, and hope, and resolution, though no nearer perfection and tried wisdom than any other man with crude beliefs and enthusiasms and untested powers for good or evil—to him death still appeared one of the most awful facts in life, and he could not think unmoved of the task of announcing to such a man as this, that his last chances were over, and

such life as one can live in this world was for him a thing of the past for ever now. Not a twelvemonth later, Graham had stood by so many dying men, had listened to so many dying speeches, had seen death met in so many forms, and with such strange variety of character, with indifference or calmness, or resignation, with wild triumph, or wilder remorse, that he looked back with a sort of wonder on his present inexperience and perplexity. Not the less, however, did he now sit framing a dozen speeches one after the other, dreading the effect of saying too much, and fearing to say too little, till, about an hour after Madelon had fallen asleep, M. Linders at length stirred, opened his eyes, and tried to move.

Graham was at his side instantly, and the sick man gazed up at him in silence for a moment.

"What has happened?" he said at last

in a feeble voice; "who are you? where is Madelon?"

"Madelon is in the next room asleep," answered Graham; "you met with an accident last night—I am an English doctor staying in the hotel—the French one had to leave—do you remember?"

He paused between each sentence, and M. Linders' eyes, which were fixed upon him as he spoke, gradually acquired an expression of intelligence as memory returned to him. He closed them again and turned away his head.

"Yes, I remember something about it," he said, "but—*que diable*—I cannot move a limb: am I much hurt?"

"A good deal," said Graham, helping him to raise himself a little. "You had better keep quiet, and take this," giving him a cordial, as M. Linders sank back exhausted.

"That is better," he said, after a few

minutes of struggling breathing. "So I am a good deal hurt? Am I—am I going to die by chance, M. le Docteur?"

He spoke in his old half-sarcastic, half-cynical way, but with a feeble, gasping voice, that made an effect of contrast, as of the tragic face espied behind the grinning mask. Somehow it touched Graham, burdened as he was with the consciousness of the death-warrant he had to pronounce, and he paused before answering. M. Linders noticed his hesitation.

"Bah!" he said, "speak, then; do you think I am afraid—a coward that fears to know the worst? I shall not be the first man that has died, nor, in all probability, the last. We ought to be used to it by this time, *nous autres!*"

"Perhaps it is always best to be prepared for the worst," says Graham, recovering himself at this address, and taking refuge

at last in a conventional little speech. "And though we must always hope for the best, I do not think it right to conceal from you, Monsieur, that you are very much injured and shaken. If you have any arrangements to make, anyone you would wish to send for, or to see, I earnestly advise you to lose no time."

He watched M. Linders narrowly as he spoke, and saw a sudden gleam of fear or excitement light up his dull eyes for a moment, whilst his fingers clutched nervously at the sheet, but that was all the sign he made.

"So—I am going to die?" he said, after a pause. "Well—that is ended, then. Send for anyone? Whom should I send for?" he added, with some vehemence. "For your priests, I suppose, to come and light candles, and make prayers over me—is that what you are thinking of, by chance? I won't have

one of them—you need not think it, do you hear?—not one."

"Pardon me," said Graham, "but it was not of priests I was thinking just then—indeed, it seems to me that, at these moments, a man can turn nowhere so safely as to his God—but there are others——"

He spoke quietly enough, but M. Linders interrunpted him with a fierce, hoarse whisper. "I can arrange my own affairs. I have no one to send to—no one I wish to see. Let me die in peace."

In spite of his assumed indifference, his whole soul was filled and shaken with a sudden dread terror; for the moment he had forgotten even his child. Graham saw it, but could not urge him further just then; he only passed his arm under the pillow, so as to raise his head a little, and then said, with such professional cheerfulness as he could muster,

"*Allons*, Monsieur, you must have courage. Calm yourself; you are not going to die yet, and we must hope for the best. You may live to see many people yet."

M. Linders appeared scarcely to hear what he was saying; but in a few moments his face relaxed, and a new expression came into it, which seemed to soften the grey, ghastly look.

"My poor little girl!" he said, with a sort of groan—"my little Madelon!—to leave thee all alone, *pauvre petite!*"

"It was precisely of her that I wished to speak," said Graham. "I am afraid, in any case, you must look forward to a long illness, and, on her account, is there no friend, no relation you would wish to send for?"

"I have no friends—no relations," said M. Linders, impatiently. "A long illness? Bah! M. le Docteur, I know, and you know that I am going to die—to-day, to-morrow,

who knows?—and she will be left alone. She has no one in the world but me, and she has been foolish enough to love me—my little one!"

He paused for a moment, and then went on, with a vehemence that struggled for utterance, with his hoarse feeble voice and failing breath.

"If this cursed accident had happened but one day sooner or later, I could have left her a fortune—but a superb fortune; only one day sooner—I had it two days ago—or to-morrow—I should have had my revenge last night of that *scélérat*—that devil—that Legros, and won back the money he cheated me of, he—he—of all men, a mere beginner, a smatterer—ah! if I had been the man I once was, it would have been a different account to settle——"

He lay back panting, but began again before Graham could speak.

"I only want time—give me a little time, and my little Madeleine shall have such a fortune as shall make her independent of every one; or stay, why not send for him now? I will give you his address—yes, now—now at once, before it is too late!"

"That is quite impossible, Monsieur," Graham answered with decision; "and if you agitate yourself in this way, I must refuse to listen to another word. You are doing all you can to lessen your chances of recovery."

"You do not play, Monsieur?" said M. Linders, struck with a new idea, and not in the least attending to what Graham was saying.

"Do you want to win my money?" said the young man, half smiling. "No, I do not play, nor, if I did, have I any money to lose. Leave all these notions alone, I entreat of you; calm yourself; you need not

trouble yourself to speak much, but just tell me what your wishes are concerning your little girl—in any case it is always best to be prepared. Have you made any will? Is there any one to whose care you would wish to entrust her in the event of your death?"

M. Linders had exhausted his strength and his passion for the moment, and answered quietly enough. No, he had made no will, he said—of what use? Everything he had was hers, of course—little enough too, as matters stood. He owned he did not know what was to become of her; he had made no arrangements—he had never thought of its coming to this, and then he had always counted on leaving her a fortune. He had sometimes thought of letting her be brought up for the stage; that might be arranged now, if he could see S——, the manager of the

Théâtre ——. Could he be sent for at once?

"Certainly, if you really wish it," answered Graham with some hesitation, and then added frankly, "I have no sort of right to offer an opinion, but will you not consider a moment before fixing on such a fate for your child? She is surely very young to be thrown amongst strangers, on such a doubtful career, especially without you at hand to protect her."

"It is true I shall not be there," said the father with a groan; "I had forgotten that. And I shall never see my little one grown up. Ah! what is to become of her?"

"Has she no relations?" said Graham, "in England for instance——"

"In England!" cried M. Linders fiercely, "what could make you fancy that?"

"I had understood that her mother was English—" began Graham.

"You are right, Monsieur; her mother was English, but she has no English relations, or, if she has, they are nothing to her, and she shall never know them. No," he said slowly, after a pause, "I suppose there is only one thing to be done, and yet I would almost rather she lay here dead by my side, that we might be buried together in one grave; it would perhaps be happier for her, poor little one! Ah, what a fate! but it must be—you are right, I cannot send her out alone and friendless into the world, she must go to her aunt."

"She has an aunt, then," said Graham, with some surprise.

"Yes, Monsieur, she has an aunt, my sister Thérèse, with whom I quarrelled five and twenty years ago, and whom I have cordially hated ever since; and if ever woman deserved to be hated, she does;" and indeed, though he had not mentioned his

sister's name for years, the very sound of it seemed to revive the old enmity in all its fresh bitterness. "She lives near Liége," he went on presently. "She is the Superior of a convent there, having risen to that eminence through her superior piety and manifold good works, doubtless. *Mon Dieu!*" he cried, with another of his sudden impotent bursts of passion and tenderness, "that it should have come to this, that I should shut up my little one in a convent! And she will be miserable—she will blame me, she will think me cruel; but what can I do? what can I do?"

"But it seems to me the best thing possible," said Graham, who, in truth, was not a little relieved by this sudden and unexpected solution of all difficulties. "So many children are educated in convents, and are very happy there; she will be certainly well taught and cared for, and you

must trust to your sister for the future."

"Never!" he said, half raising himself on his elbow with a mighty effort. "Well taught!—yes, I know the sort of teaching she will get there; she will be taught to hate and despise me, and then they will make her a nun—they will try to do it, but that shall never be! I will make Madelon promise me that. My little one a nun!—I will not have it! Ah! I risk too much; she shall not go!"

He fell back on the pillow gasping, panting, almost sobbing, all pretence and semblance of cynicism and indifference gone in this miserable moment of weakness and despair. Was it for this, then, that he had taught his child to love him—that he had watched and guarded and cherished her—that he should place her now in the hands of his enemy, and that she should learn to hate his memory when he was dead? Ah!

he was dying, and from the grave there would be no return—no hand could be stretched out from thence to claim her—no voice make itself heard to appeal to her old love for him, to remind her of happy by-gone days when she had believed in him, and to bid her be faithful to him still. Those others would be able to work their will then, while he lay silent for evermore, and his little one would too surely learn what manner of father she had had, perhaps —who knows?—learn to rejoice in the day that had set her free from his influence.

Graham very likely understood something of what was passing in M. Linders' mind, revealed, as it had been, by those few broken words, for he said in a kind voice,

"I think you may surely trust to your child's love for you, M. Linders, for she seems to have found all her happiness in it hitherto, and it is so strong and true that I

do not think it will be easily shaken, nor can I fancy anyone will be cruel enough to attempt it." And then, seeing how little capable M. Linders seemed at that moment of judging wisely, he went on to urge the necessity of Madelon's being sent to her aunt as her natural guardian, representing the impossibility of leaving her without money or friends in the midst of strangers.

"There is a little money," said M. Linders, "a few thousand francs—I do not know how much exactly; you will find it in that desk. It would start her for the stage; she has talent—she would rise. S—— heard her sing once; if he were here now, we might arrange——"

He was rambling off in a low broken voice, hardly conscious, perhaps, of what he was saying. Graham once more interposed.

"No, no," he said, "you must not think

of it. Let her go to her aunt. Don't be uneasy about her getting there safely; I will take charge of her."

"You will?" said M. Linders, fixing his dim eyes on Graham, and with some resumption of his old manner. "Pardon, Monsieur, but who are you, that you take such an interest in my affairs?"

"Anyone must take an interest in your little girl," said Graham warmly, and in the kind, frank voice that somehow always carried with it the conviction of his sincerity and good faith, "and I am truly glad that the chance that brought me to this hotel has put it in my power to be of use to you and to her. For the rest, my name is Graham, and I am an army surgeon. I don't suppose you recollect the circumstance, Monsieur, but I very well remember meeting you at Chaudfontaine some years ago."

"No, I don't remember," said M. Linders

faintly, "but I think I may trust you. You will see that Madelon reaches Liége safely?"

"I will take her there myself," answered Graham. "Would you like to send any message to your sister?"

"I will write," said M. Linders, "or rather you shall write for me; but presently—I cannot talk any more now—it must do presently."

Indeed he was faint from exhaustion, and Graham could only do all that was possible to revive him, and then remain by his side till he should have recovered his strength a little; and as he sat there, silently watching, I daresay he preached a little sermon to himself, but in no unfriendly spirit to his patient, we may be sure. This, then, was what life might come to—this might be the end of all its glorious possibilities, of all its boundless hopes and aims. To this man, as to another, had the great problem been

presented, and he had solved it—thus; and to Graham, in the fulness of his youth, and strength, and energy, the solution seemed stranger than the problem. To most of us, perhaps, as years go on, life comes to be represented by its failures rather than its successes, by its regrets rather than its hopes; enthusiasms die out, illusions vanish, belief in the perfectibility of ourselves and of others fades, as we learn to realize the shortness of life, the waywardness of human nature, the baffling power of circumstances, too easily allowed; but in their place, a humble faith in a more perfect and satisfying hereafter, which shall be the complement of our existence here, the fulfilment of our unfinished efforts, our many shortcomings, springs up, let us trust, to encourage us to new strivings, to ever-fresh beginnings, which shall perhaps be completed and bear fruit in another world, perhaps be left on

earth to work into the grand economy of progress—not wholly useless in any case. But at four or five and twenty, in spite of some failures and disappointments, the treasure of existence to an honest, frank heart, still seems inexhaustible as it is inestimable. The contrast between the future Graham looked forward to, full of hopes and ambitions, and this past whose history he could guess at, and whose results he contemplated, forced itself upon him, and an immense compassion filled the young man's heart at the sight of this wasted life, of this wayward mind, lighted up with the sudden, passionate gleams of tenderness for his child, the one pure affection perhaps that survived to witness to what had been—a great compassion, an honest, wondering pity for this man who had thus recklessly squandered his share of the common birthright. Ah! which of us, standing on safe

shores, and seeing, as all must see at times, the sad wreck of some shattered life cast up by the troubled waves at our feet, does not ask himself, in no supercilious spirit, surely, but with an awe-struck humility, "Who or what hath made thee to differ?"

Perhaps, as M. Linders lay there, he also preached to himself a little sermon, after his own peculiar fashion, for when, at the end of half an hour, he once more aroused himself, all signs of agitation had disappeared, and it was with a perfect calmness that he continued the conversation. Graham could not but admire this composure in the man whom but just now he had seen shaken with passion and exhausted with conflicting emotions; whom indeed he had had to help, and judge for, and support in his hour of weakness and suffering; whilst now M. Linders had resumed his air of calm supe-

riority as the man of the world, which seemed at once to repel and to forbid support and sympathy from the youth and inexperience at his side.

"You are right, Monsieur," he said, breaking the silence abruptly, and speaking in a clear, though feeble voice, "Madelon must go to her aunt. Did I understand you to say you would take charge of her to Liége?"

"I will certainly," said Graham; "if——"

"I am exceedingly indebted to you," said M. Linders, "but I am afraid such a journey may interfere with your own plans."

"Not in the least," replied Graham. "I am only travelling for amusement, and have no one to consult but myself.'"

"Ah—well, I shall not interfere with your amusement long; and in the meantime, believe me, I am sensible of your

goodness. It may make matters easier if you take a letter from me to my sister. I am afraid I cannot write myself, but I could dictate—if it be not troubling you too much—there are a pen and ink somewhere there; and if you could give me anything—I still feel rather faint."

Graham rose, gave him another cordial, drew a small table to the bedside, and sat down to write. M. Linders considered for a moment, and then began to dictate.

"MA SŒUR,—We parted five and twenty years ago, with a mutual determination never to see each other again—a resolution which has been perfectly well kept, and which there is no danger of our breaking now, as I shall be in my grave before you read this letter; and you will have the further consolation of reflecting that, as we have never met again in this world, neither is there any

probability of our doing so in another——"

"Pardon me," said Graham, laying down his pen, as M. Linders dictated these last words, "but you are about to recommend your child to your sister's care; of what use can it be to begin with words that can only embitter any ill-feeling there may have been between you?"

"But it is a great consolation I am offering her there," says M. Linders, in his feeble voice. "However, as you will—*recommençons;* but no more interruptions, Monsieur, for my strength is not inexhaustible."

"MA SŒUR,—It is now five and twenty years since we parted, with the determination never to see each other again. Whether we have done well to keep to this resolution or not, matters little now; we shall, at any rate, have no temptation in the future to break it, for I shall be in my grave before

you receive this letter. I am dying, a fact which may possess some faint interest for you even now—or may not—that is not to the purpose either. It is not of myself that I would speak, but of my child. I am sending her to you, Thérèse, as to the only relative she has in the world; look on her, if you prefer it, as your mother's only grandchild; we had a mother once who loved me, and whom you professed to love—for her sake be kind to Madelon. I am not rich, and without money I cannot leave her amongst strangers, otherwise I would have found some other means of providing for her; at the same time, I do not send her to you absolutely penniless—she will take to you the sum of three thousand francs, which will provide her board for the next two or three years, at any rate; I do not cast her on your charity. I have two requests to make, and if your religion teaches you to have any

regard for the wishes of a dying man, I trust you will hold them sacred as such. In the first place, I demand of you that you should not bring her up to be a nun; she has not, and never will have, the slightest vocation—is not that the right word?—for such a life. My wish is that she should be educated for the stage, but I do not absolutely desire it; circumstances must in some measure decide, and something must be left to your discretion, but a nun she shall not be. In the second place, respect my memory, so far as my little Madeleine is concerned. Keep your powers of abusing me, if they be not already exhausted, for the benefit of others; she has never been separated from me since she was an infant, and the little fool has actually learnt to love me, and to believe in me. It is an innocent delusion, and has made her happy—do not disturb it. I tell you, my sister, it will be the worst work you have

yet wrought upon earth, and an evil day for you, if, even when I am in my grave, you try to come between me and my daughter.

"Your brother,

"ADOLPHE LINDERS."

"I will sign it," said the sick man, holding out his hand for the pen. He had dictated the letter with some pauses and gasps for breath, but in the uniform indifferent voice that he had adopted since the beginning of the conversation. He dropped the pen, when he had scrawled the signature with almost powerless fingers, and his hand fell heavily on the bed again. "That is done," he said, and, after a pause, continued, "Monsieur, circumstances have compelled me to place a confidence in you, with which, at another time, I should have hesitated to burden you, fearing to cause you inconvenience."

"You cause me no inconvenience, and I shall do my best to carry out your wishes," said Horace. "In return, I must beg of you to keep yourself quiet now."

"One moment, Monsieur—my money you will find in that desk, as I have said; after paying my funeral and other expenses, you will, I think, find there is still the sum left that I have named in my letter. I must beg of you to hand it over to my sister. I can trust her so far, I believe; and I will not have my child a pauper on her hands, dependent on her charity for food and clothing; otherwise it might have been wiser—however, it is too late now, and in two or three years much may happen. One word more, and I have done. I have no sort of claim on your kindness, Monsieur, but you have proved yourself a friend, and as such I would ask you not to lose sight of Madelon entirely. She will be but a

friendless little one when I am gone, and I have not much confidence in her aunt's tender mercies."

"You may depend upon it that I will not," said Graham earnestly, and hardly thinking of the sort of responsibility he was accepting.

"Thank you; then that is all. And now, Monsieur le Docteur, how long do you give me?"

"How long?" said Graham.

"Ah! how long to live?—to-day, to-night, to-morrow? How long, in short?"

Then Graham spoke plainly at last, without further reticence or concealment, so useless in the face of this indifference and levity, real or affected.

"M. Linders," he said, "the chance on which your recovery hangs is so slight, that I do not think it probable, hardly possible,

that you can live over to-morrow. Will you not try to understand this?"

There was something so wistful and kind and honest in Graham's expression as he stood there, looking down on his patient, that M. Linders was touched, perhaps, for he held out his hand with a little friendly gesture; but even then he could not, or would not abandon his latest pose of dying *en philosophe.*

"I understand well enough," he answered; "a man does not arrive at my age, *mon ami*, without having faced death more than once. You think, perhaps, it has terrors for me?—not at all; to speak frankly, pain has, but I do not suffer so much now. That is a bad sign, perhaps. Well, never mind, you have done your best for me, I know, and I thank you. Except for that little regret that you know of as regards Legros and—and Madelon, I am content that life should come to

an end—it is not too delightful in any case, and those that I cared for most did their best to spoil mine for me. For people who believe in a hereafter, and choose to contemplate a doubtful future, adorned with flames and largely peopled with devils, I can imagine death to have its unpleasant side; but I look upon all such notions as unphilosophical in the extreme. And now, Monsieur, I think I could sleep a little. By-and-by, when Madelon awakes, I should like to see her."

He turned his head away, and presently fell into a light dose. Did he mean, or did he persuade himself that he meant half of what he said? Graham could not decide; and, in truth, he had uttered his little speech with an air of dignity and resignation that half imposed upon the younger man, and impressed him, in spite of his better judgment. An heroic soul going forth with an

unfeigned stoicism to meet its fate? Or an unhappy man, striving to hide a shivering consciousness from himself, and others with an assumption of philosophical scepticism? Ah! who was Graham, that he should judge or weigh the secrets of another man's heart at such an hour as this? He left the bedside, and went back once more to his writing.

A few minutes afterwards, Madame Lavaux knocked softly, and looked into the room. Graham went out into the passage to speak to her, closing the door after him.

"How is he now, the poor Monsieur?" asks Madame.

"He is sleeping now," Graham answered; "there is nothing to be done but to keep him as quiet as possible."

"And will he recover, do you think?"

"Hardly. One must always hope; but he is very ill."

"Ah! well," said the landlady, resigning herself; "but, after all," she added, "it is sad to see a man die like that; and then there is the child. Otherwise the world will be none the worse for wanting him. But what is to become of the little girl?"

"That is all arranged," replied Graham, "she is to go to an aunt, a sister of her father's, who, it appears, is Superior of a convent near Liége. But can you tell me, Madame, had Madame Linders quarrelled with her English relations? When she was dying alone here, had she no friends of her own that she could have sent for to be with her?"

"She would not have them, Monsieur; you see, she was devoted to her husband in spite of all, this poor Madame, and *he* had quarrelled with her relations, I believe; at any rate, she would not send for them. 'Adolphe will come,' she would always say,

'and it would vex him to find anyone here,' and so she died alone, for he never arrived till the next morning. However," continues Madame, "it was not of that I came to speak now, it was to know if Monsieur would not wish to have a nurse to-night to attend to the poor gentleman? It is what we must have had if you had not been here, and there is no reason why you should knock yourself up with nursing him."

"It certainly might be better," said Graham considering, "I had thought of it, but —however, you are quite right, Madame, a nurse we will have; where can I get one?"

Madame said he had better apply to the Sœurs de Charité, and gave him an address, adding that if he would like to go himself she could spare half an hour to sit with Monsieur there.

"I will go at once," replied Graham, "whilst he is sleeping; he is not likely to rouse again just at present; don't let him talk or move if he should awake, but it is not probable that he will."

So it was arranged, and Madame Lavaux established herself with her knitting in the dim, silent room, whilst Graham departed on his errand, satisfied that his patient was in safe hands. Not ten minutes had elapsed, however, when a knock came at the door of the sick-room, and a summons —could Madame come at once? Madame cast a look at her charge; he was perfectly still and quiet, sleeping profoundly apparently; there could be no harm in leaving him for a moment. She went, intending to return immediately; but, alas! for human intentions, downstairs she found a commotion that drove M. Linders, M. le Docteur, and everything else out of her head for the

time being. Madame la Comtesse *au premier* had lost her diamond ring—her ring, worth six thousand francs, an heirloom, an inestimable treasure; lost it? it had been stolen—she knew it, felt convinced of it; she had left it for five minutes on her dressing-table whilst she went to speak to some dressmaker or milliner, and on her return it had vanished. Unpardonable carelessness on her part, she admitted, but that did not alter the fact; it had been stolen, and must be found; house, servants, visitors, luggage, all must be searched and ransacked. Where were the gendarmes? let all these people be taken into custody at once, pointing to the group of startled, wondering, servants,—let everyone be taken into custody. Madame Lavaux had enough to do and to think of for the next hour, we may be sure, and though, at the end of that time, Madame la Comtesse found the ring safe in

the corner of her pocket, whither it had slipped off her finger, and the disturbance was at an end, not so were the consequences of that disturbance.

For in the meantime a very different scene was being acted out upstairs.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

LONDON: PRINTED BY MACDONALD AND TUGWELL, BLENHEIM HOUSE.